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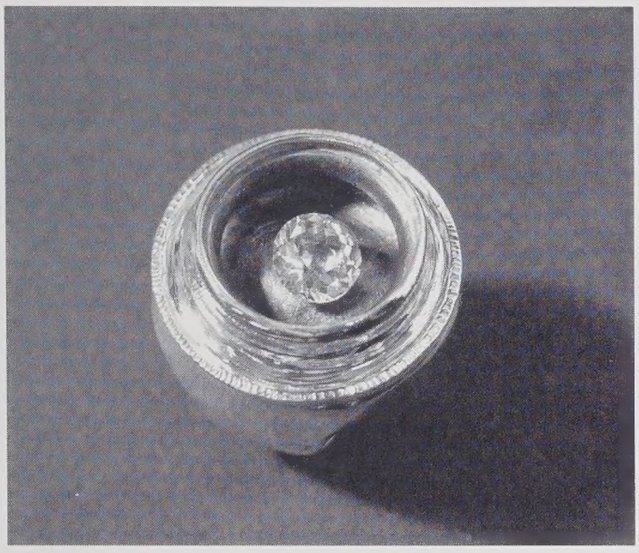

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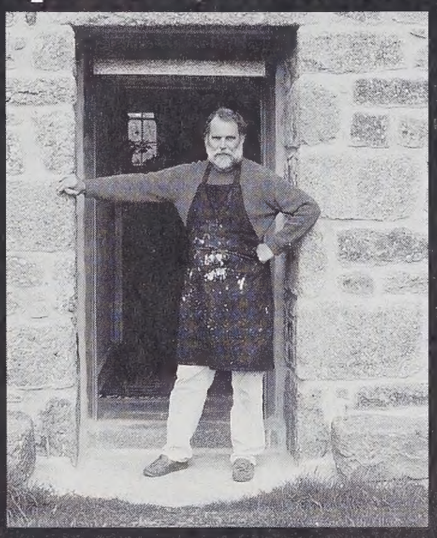

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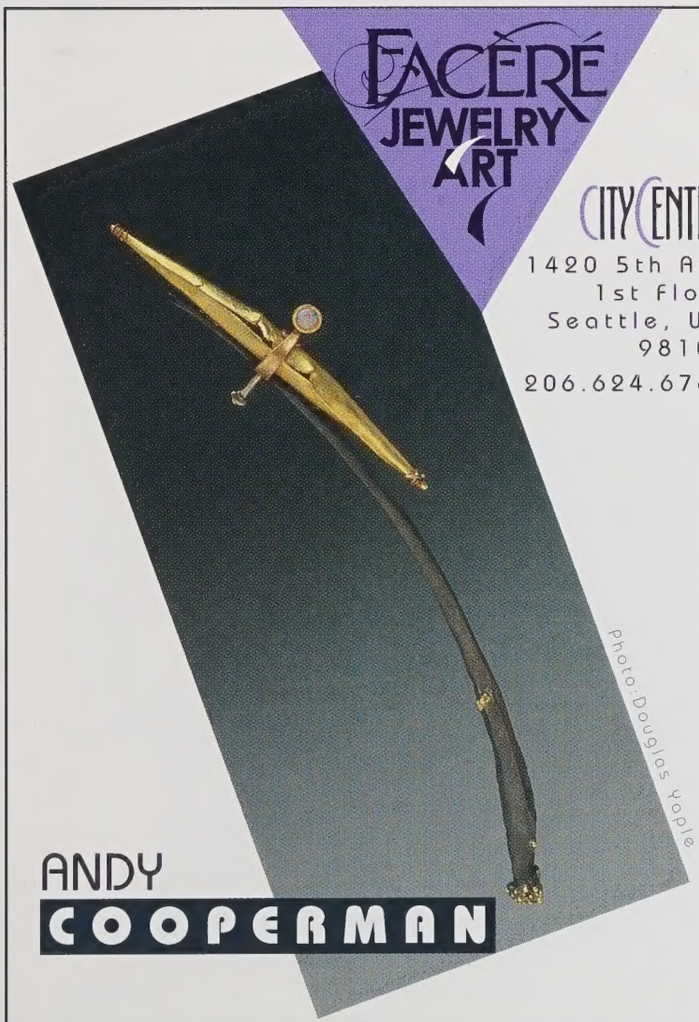

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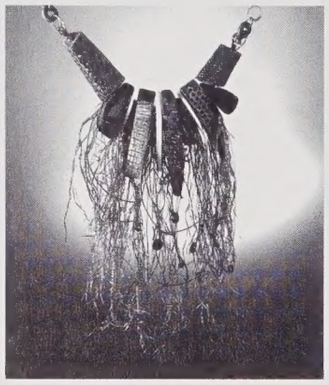

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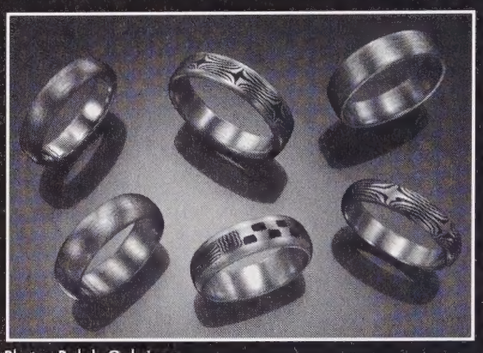

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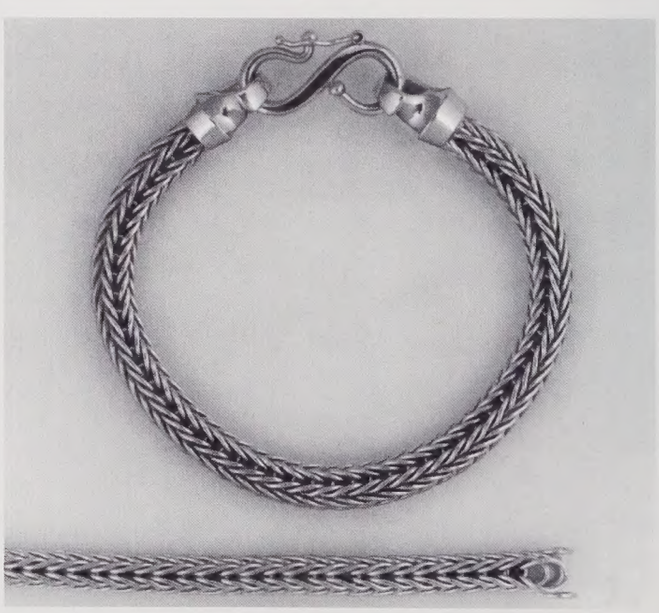

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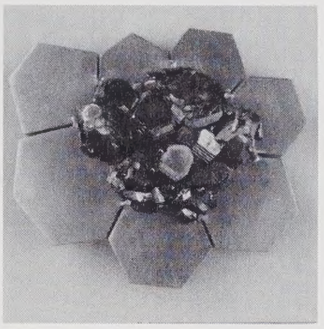

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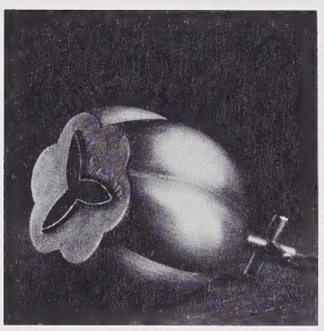

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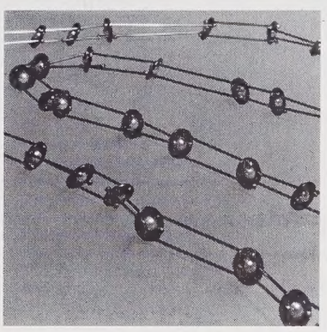

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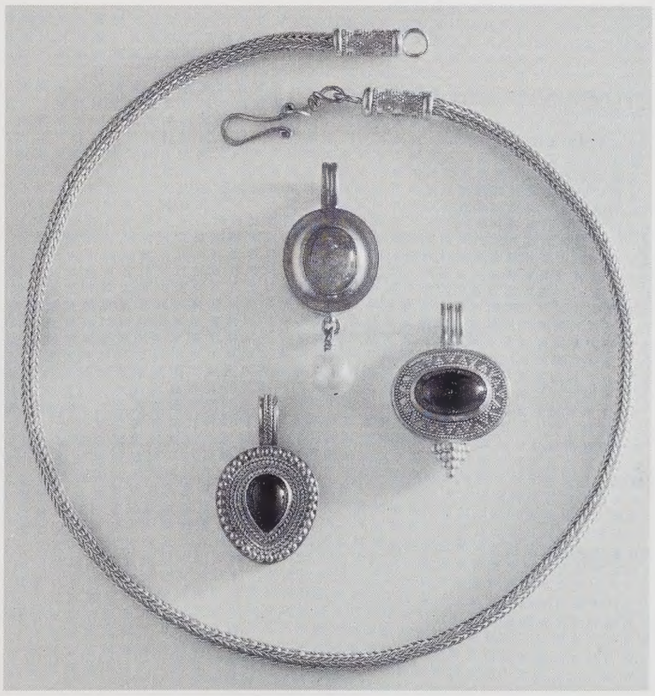

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Phillip Fike
All Sixteen Upfront, (a sawblade container unit), 1985
gold, sterling, stainless steel, brass, delrin, wood
7½ x ⅝ x 16½"
Photograph by Jerry Anthony
See page 16

Above
Kim Rawdin
Bracelet, 1995
sterling, 14k bezels, corals, moonstone, aquamarine, chrysoprase, lapis, calcedonys, jades, chryacholla
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Graphic Designer: Richard Mehl
Circulation and Advertising: Bob Mitchell
Advertising Layout: Robert Fleury
Production Coordinator: Samuel Shaw
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Address editorial material to:
Frank C. Lewis, Editor
Metalsmith
2755 North Murray Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53211
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Editorial

There is frequently a connection between a particular process and the person who taught it to you. At the bench many feel a part of a historical continuum that connects the present moment to the time they first learned the technique at a workshop or in a classroom. And through that memory they may recall the story that the demonstrator told about how she first learned the process from her mentor, or discovered and attempted it on a trip to some foreign locale. It seems to me that in the community of metalsmiths these connections are particularly important. In metalsmithing, the histories of processes and the individuals who developed, revived, or created them are widely known and shared. Few of us think of a fibula or textile techniques in metal without also thinking of a particular artist.

Yet, as works move from the bench to craft shows, galleries, and shops that continuum may be disrupted. Unless the viewer/patron is very familiar with our field or has developed a close relationship with artists, processes may mean little to them. Viewers often see only the thing in front of them. Many have no idea as to the difficulty or ease of a particular process. They perceive the object, in a sense, outside of its history, in the immediate moment of form, color, line, materials, and possibly the narrative or symbolism of the piece, when those things are readily apparent.

Arguably the experience of any patron who is unaware of processes and the working nature of materials is limited; at least when compared to the experience of practitioners, who can find in a work, a richness of history, tradition, lineage, and process. (Maybe that explains to some degree why craft shows, artists' booths, and galleries that really nurture their clientele seem to be the most successful at selling.) A part of my job and a part of all of our jobs is to try to explain those things to the uninitiated. Yet, at the same time, we all need to be aware that ultimately much of that knowledge can only be conveyed through hands on experience and can only be richly experienced by a patron willing to work.

Considering this sensitivity towards tradition in the metals community, it always suprises me that for many non-writers words are not equally considered a physical medium. As a writer, who also makes objects, I am surprised at the number of craftspeople who only see words as a carrier of meaning. In fact they often expect words to be transparent, as if we can look through them to their meaning, as if meaning itself is absolute. Yet at the same time artists will talk to patrons about electroforming, raising, forging, casting, as if these words (and the meaning of these processes) too, were transparent. When I first became interested in metals, a metalsmith was quick to correct my assumption that his work was electroformed rather than raised, and concomitant with that correction was an attitude that the difference was important, not just one of convenience or familiarity.

When we look a word up in the dictionary, how many of us read below the first or secondary definition to find examples of the particular uses of that word in our language, to discern its nuance. When writers choose *quotidian* over *mundane*, *boring*, *common*, or *everyday*, most do so, not to impress the reader with their vocabulary but because for them that particular word may have a history, a network of associations, even a rhythmic sound that the other words do not offer. Writers I know even read their writing out loud, even in private, to find the music and flow. This is correlative to the metalsmith who may stroke a surface or balance a piece in their hand. Often a term of so-called *artspeak* is as different and as meaningful from another more simple phrasing as is casting different from electroforming.

None of us would deny that metalsmithing and the acquisition of its necessary skills are work, yet only a very few would deny enjoying that process and the additonal associations it brings to an object. Like metalsmithing, reading is work, but as an editor who still remembers the first time I encountered many terms, I believe the rewards are worth it for the patron (reader) willing to do a bit of effort.

– FCL

The Editor wishes to note that the article "Jewelry Mediating Jewlery" by Jaime Bennett, in the Winter 1998 issue of *Metalsmith* was a transcription of a lecture presented by Mr. Bennett at the Cranbrook Museum of Art.

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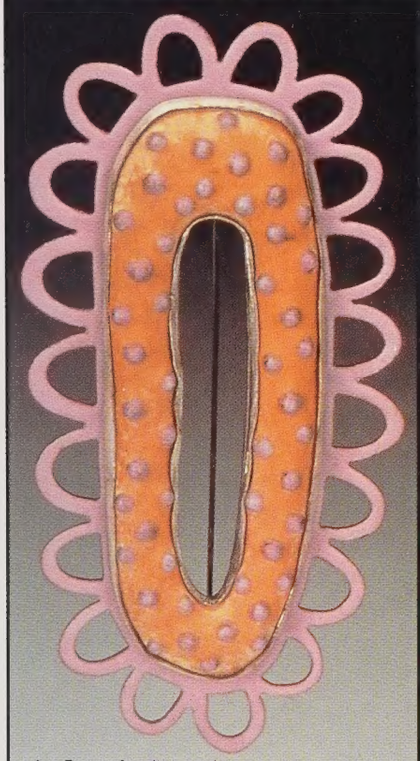

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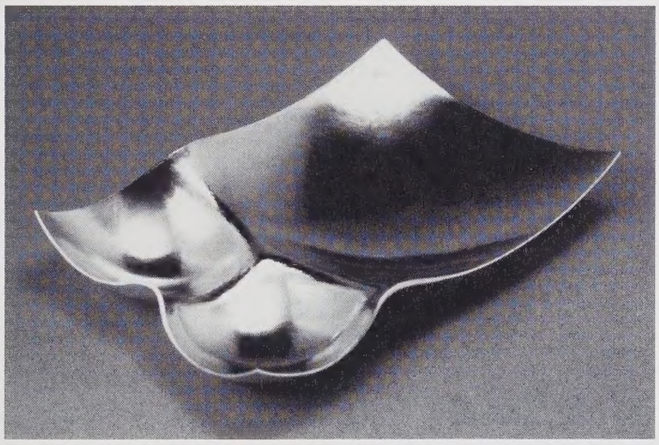

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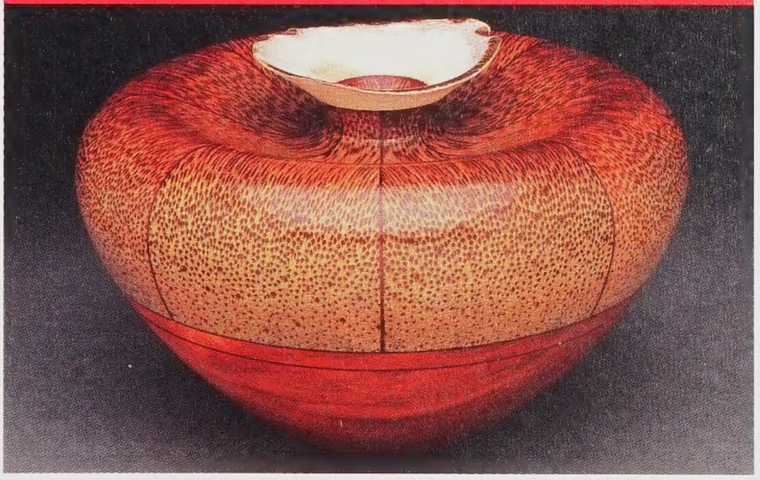

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Recent Sightings

Bruce Metcalf

"If, as I suspect, a modernist impetus has become institutionalized, if the interesting legacies of the great formalist and dadaist years have created a new *Pompier* art then I would hope and pray to be post-*that*."
– R.B. Kitaj, as quoted in Marco Livingstone, *Kitaj*, Phaidon Press, 1992

Professor Jamie Bennett has made quite a stir lately, first with his article "Jewelry Mediating Jewelry" in the Winter 1998 issue of *Metalsmith*, and then with his debate with Keith Lewis at the SNAG conference in March. In his writing and in the debate, Bennett describes a methodology, as well as an idealistic potential, for contemporary jewelry. As near as I can tell (after reading the article three times), he seems to outline a practice in which the means and ends of jewelry must be subject to critical examination. Bennett suggests that jewelry should become a discourse, with its subject matter at the proper Postmodern distance from the maker. As Bennett says, "...jewelry ...defined itself as a field that was engaged in the idea of discursive techniques as a means of making more meaningful and socially relevant jewelry."[1]

Bennett underlines the idea of social relevance, stressing that jewelry should be effective. However, he is a little vague about what jewelry should be effective at doing. At one point, he says that "Jewelry *can* alter the consciousness of the body"[2]; later he says that jewelers "...can affect the direction [the body] takes and the attitude it has."[3] Otherwise, he doesn't say much on the subject, but the subtext of social intervention and change has been made clear.

At first glance, this appears to be all very forward-looking. Bennett seems to describe the proper artistic approach for our era; the proper vehicle for the inexorable march of progress. Those who don't get on the bus, well, they'll just be left in the dustbin of history. Other approaches that characterize previous decades, like the Surrealism of the 1940's, the "good design" of the 1950's, Funk and Pop Art of the 1960's, and the self-expression of the 1970's, appear to be obsolete in Bennett's view. And, in fact, the debate at the SNAG conference was about Bennett's assertion that the personal (by which I think he means autobiography) is no longer a legitimate subject matter for jewelry.

A number of artists in jewelry and metalsmithing meet with Bennett's approval, and appear to follow his directive. Myra Mimlitsch-Gray, Lisa Norton, Alyssa Dee Krauss, and Julia Barello all come to mind. And, looking at the 1998 SNAG Juried Student Exhibition in Seattle, it's clear that a number of students have identified this discursive approach as the jewelry avant-garde. Their work was characterized by a number of strategies that also characterize current art-world practice. These strategies include the idea of drawing subject matter from the field itself, the use of installations, photography, and text applied to objects, and a general attitude of questioning any form of authority.

Don't get me wrong: I like this kind of work if it's done well. But I also have my doubts. What Bennett is describing is the new formula *du jour*, the academic style of the decade. Basically, he reiterates the strategies employed in the past decade's conceptual art, embodied in the work of artists like Mike Kelley, Janine Antoni, and Lorna Simpson. These artists all have two things in common: first, they have returned to using real objects in their artworks (as opposed to dematerializing the artwork in pure text or performance). Second, the concept is clearly more important than the object itself[4]. From one point of view, Bennett is simply trying to drag craft into the mainstream of twentieth century art. But from another point of view, Bennett is betraying one of the bedrock values of the craftworld – its loyalty to medium and process – by declaring that material is always secondary to idea.

Bennett will no doubt protest, and say that he doesn't really mean this. But if there is to be a true conceptual craft, it has to play by the artworld's rules. Are you loyal to your ideas, or are you loyal to your craft? You've gotta choose. The conceptual artist will give up the craft in an instant, and adopt the material and format most appropriate to the idea. But a committed craftsperson won't give up her craft: it's simply too valuable to throw away. In my view, this loyalty to medium and process is one of the essential differences between craft practice and art practice. It's what sets craft apart, and is important precisely because it marks a difference.

So, I would say that most of the paragons of craft virtue that Bennett mentions are not *really* conceptual artists. They're craftspeople. Myra Mimlitsch-Gray continues to make metalwork, with exacting skill. She carefully restricts her ideas to the range of metalwork itself, so she can continue to use her craft as the medium of her expression. She doesn't use the typical formats of conceptual art: video; performance; text-on-the-walls. She uses metalsmithing; she's a metalsmith. For Mimlitsch-Gray, the craft comes first, and it limits the range of her ideas.

Why is this important? Because I think craft and art are different things. Craft objects embody a different set of desires and impulses than art does[5]. And if we want craft to survive in the next century, we probably have to focus on the distinctive qualities (and strengths) of craft, rather than the ways in which it is identical to art practice. In my view, we have to underline differences, not sameness. If the forces of sameness become institutionalized, then I think people should be suspicious, just as Kitaj was.

In his article, Bennett intentionally obscures the differences between craft and art. At the same time, he proposes a new *Pompier* art, an institutionalized formula for the production of high art. He doesn't say so explicitly, but his agenda clearly includes the possibility that jewelers who follow his directives could be regarded as artists, not just as jewelers. It's the old status gambit. Bennett implies that we are really *artists* – that we can and should practice a slightly modified version of conceptual art – and that we're only incidentally craftspeople. But is this so? What do we gain? And what do we lose?

Bruce Metcalf is a metalsmith who practices his craft in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Notes

[1] Jamie Bennett, "Jewelry Mediating Jewelry", *Metalsmith*, Volume 18, Number 1, page 30.

[2] Ibid. Page 31. The italics are Bennett's.

[3] Ibid. page 33

[4] For a very concise explanation of the priority of idea over object in conceptual art, see Adrian Piper, "Ian Burn's Conceptualism", *Art in America*, December 1997, page 74-75.

[5] For a detailed exploration of the author's view of these differences, see his "Craft and art, culture and biology" in Peter Dormer (editor), *The Culture of Craft*, Manchester University Press, 1997

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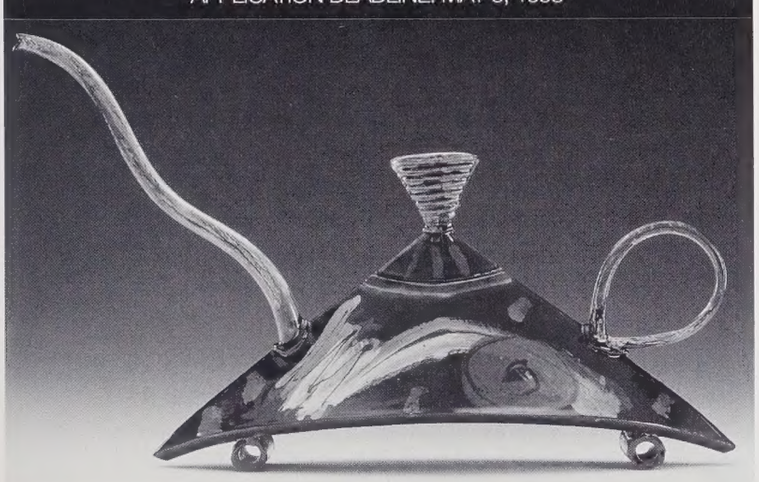

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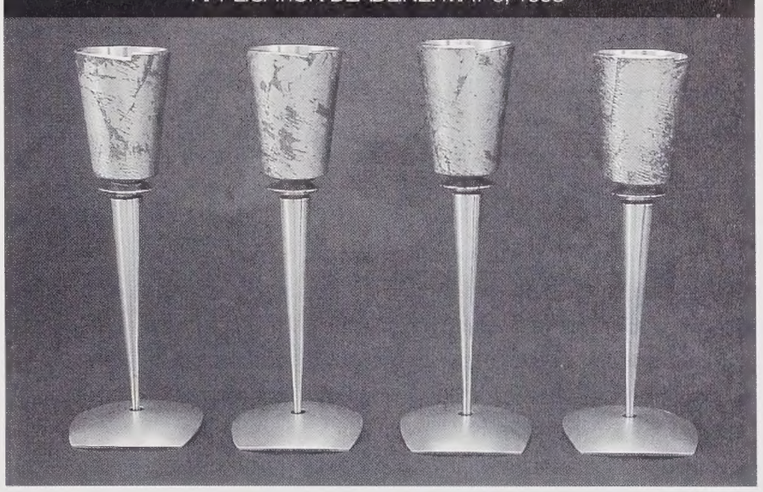

Cordials by Robert J. Farrell, winner of the 1996 Mint Museum's ACC Craft Show Acquisition Award, acquired for the permanent collection of Charlotte's Mint Museum of Art.

AMERICAN CRAFT COUNCIL

Book Review

Object and Ornament: Canadian Jewellery and Metal Art 1946-1996

by Anne Barros (Boston Mills Press, 1997)
143 pp., 51 colour plates, 103 b/w plates
Clothbound, $28

Reviewed by Barbara Isherwood

This is a landmark publication for Canadian metalsmithing. Chronicling makers of jewellery and hollowware from the 1940s to the present, it is the first major overview of metalsmithing in Canada. Through succinct text and numerous, well reproduced photographic plates, author and metalsmith Anne Barros places the work of almost 300 artists into historical context. Activities within the metals community, such as the formation of guilds, the influence of European-trained jewellers, and the growth of schools, exhibitions, and galleries, are examined alongside the broader artistic movements and social factors that have shaped the work of Canadian metalsmiths throughout the decades.

All of this is illustrated through the work of both well-known makers and those deserving of more recognition. Of particular significance is the attention paid to the early years of Canadian metalsmithing, which have suffered from inadequate documentation and the general neglect of craft history. The careers of influential makers such as silversmith Rudy Renzius and jeweller Nancy Meek Pocock warrant further investigation, and Ms. Barros's book provides both the stimulus and tools, in the form of a bibliography and a compendium of artists.

The book also provides an opportunity to assess Canadian artists' responses to trends in metalsmithing over the past fifty years. As Barros points out, the Canadian tendency towards moderation surfaces in our artistic production. Consequently, with a few exceptions, highly conceptual work has not taken a strong foothold here. Conversely, the demands of the conservative Canadian marketplace have resulted in some work in which decoration overwhelms idea. However, as *Object and Ornament* demonstrates, between these two extremes lies a large body of work that is united by excellence in design, innovation in conception, and the highest standards of craftsmanship. Sandra Noble Goss's streamlined sterling silver and acrylic necklace looks as fresh and appealing as when it was made in 1977. A full page colour reproduction of Lois Etherington Betteridge's hollowware *Ice-Cream Cone* elicits renewed appreciation for the consummate skills of this Order of Canada recipient, while Kye-yeon Son's intriguing copper bowl, pierced by curved and undulating rods, evokes curiosity about the rest of this artist's production.

Apart from its usefulness for historians and collectors, this book also serves the valuable function of fostering an enhanced sense of community among Canada's metalsmiths, who share the challenges presented by this country's vast landscape and undeveloped marketplace. For this relatively small but talented group, *Object and Ornament* will no doubt provide a well-deserved boost of confidence.

Barbara Isherwood is a freelance writer on the visual arts who resides in Toronto, Canada.

Letters

Dear Editor:

On receiving the new issue of *Metalsmith* (Summer 1997), I was pleased with the interesting article by Katherine S. Wood, until I came to the heading of "The Pleasures of Excess" (written by you). I found a few unnecessary, but amusing items, the very good work of Vicki Eisenfeld. And then I stopped in shock.

Woman's Liberation in due respect, Barbara Stutman pieces pictured here are not only in excess, they are sick. We are talking here about a private matter women go through during their productive years. Do men use a condom for public decoration?

And for you to print it is not much better. I grant you your comments, but that does not alter the fact that you gave Ms. Stutman more exposure than she deserves, leaving her to say: "See, I got away with it". But what did she prove? That she possibly has very little talent, and uses shock treatment to get attention? And is desperately trying to prove to the world that her work is as good as that of Hu and/or Fisch?

And does one's work have to give a social message, can it not just please the eye and senses, as does for instance the work of the afore mentioned artists? I know there are millions of artists in this world in all medias, who never get the recognition they deserve, who surely yearn for it as much as the next guy, but to go to such tasteless length, is sad.

Marga K. Kassimir

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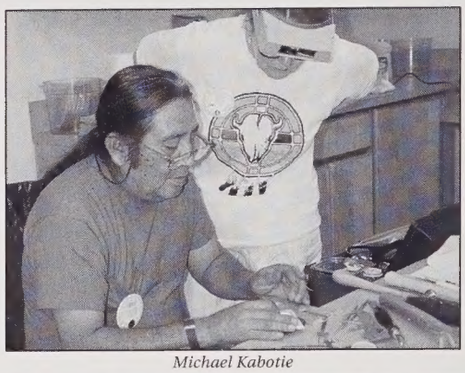

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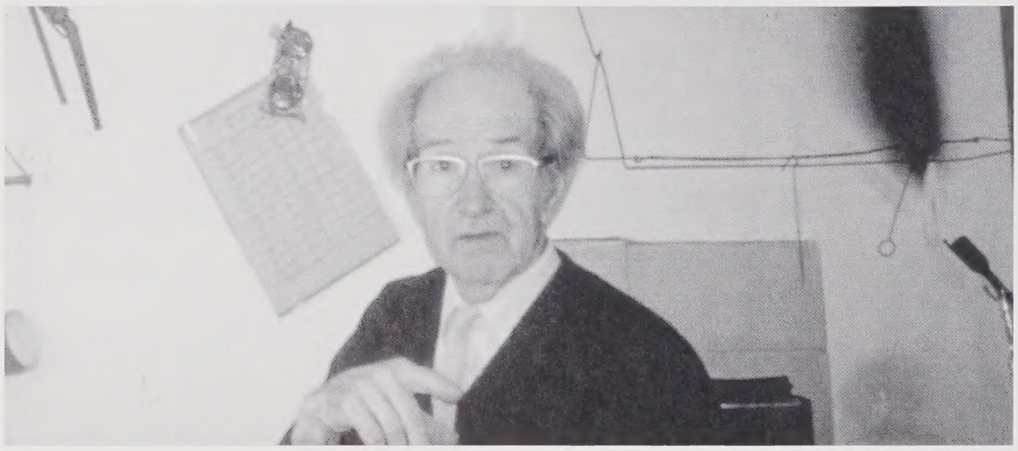
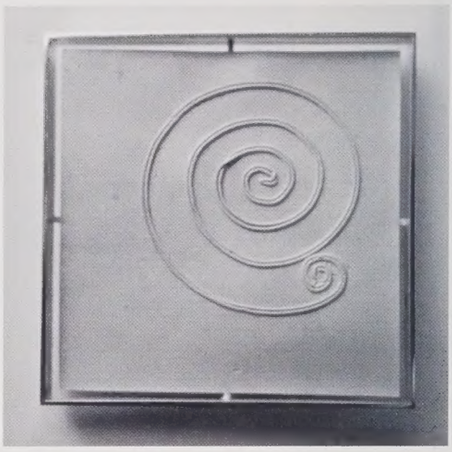
Max Frölich: A Remembrance





Two gold brooches arrive in the post – each bear an applied spiral on the surface not unlike Brancusi's symbol in his portrait of James Joyce. One begins to make connections – Joyce frequented and died in Zurich, Frölich lived and died in Zurich. They are now connected by this sign of continuum. The brooches are among Max's last pieces and arrived days after his accidental death on October 24, 1997. They attest to the fact that he lives through his work and will always be a part of the history of goldsmithing.

Born in Ennenda, Switzerland, December 16 1908, Max was a contemporary of Max Bill. They knew each other and, for a brief time, attended school together, but unlike Bill's goal to be an ARTIST, Frölich always was content to be a silversmith. He loved working with his hands. From his childhood in the valley of Canton Clarus, where his father had a textile mill, Max was drawn to watching artisans and learning from them. Academic pursuits were never his. In 1924 he enrolled in Geneva's School of Industrial Arts. There he learned to fabricate hollowware as well as to make tools. Frölich's large copper and brass vase was exhibited in the Paris Exhibition of 1925, initiating a legacy which would eventually bring his work international acclaim.

Above
Max Frölich in his studio, Zurich, February 1994
Photograph by Helen Drutt: Philadelphia

Above right
Max Frölich
Brooch, 1997
gold, 2½ x 2½ x ¼"
Photograph courtesy Helen Drutt: Philadelphia

In Zurich he learned to make jewelry while apprenticing in Heinrich Eggs's workshop, leaving there in 1934 to teach at the School of Applied Arts where he remained as a member of the faculty for 28 years. Frölich was one of the pioneers of modern jewelry. In support of his achievements The Golden Ring of Honor was bestowed upon him in 1964 by the Society of Goldsmiths in Hanau, Germany. His love affair with Africa began long before his trip to that continent in 1977, where he observed the casting of gold by the Ashanti in Ghana. Returning to Switzerland, he soon became primarily responsible for the resurgence and understanding of that technique in the Western world.

In 1994 while looking at unidentified African-inspired Swiss textiles at the Museum Bellerive, it occurred to me that these might have been made at the Frölich textile factory decades ago, remembering Max's tales of his brother's trips to Africa another connection was made. The Frölich romance with the Ashanti had its roots in his early days of childhood and continued in the spirit of his work and a collection of objects which accented his home.

Max, like the late Joseph Beuys, loved America, and America loved him. He will be remembered by all of those who knew him, his devoted wife Ruth at the Haystack School of Mountain Crafts, and by his peers whom the couple befriended at SNAG conferences. For those of us whose memories hold the image of Ruth and Max Frölich appearing almost as one in their matching suits, recounting their journeys and experiences, we too, will become part of the symbol of the spiral brooch which he passionately and thoughtfully created. "Imagination works, find a sign for a personality," Max wrote in a letter of June 11, 1997, in response to the Madeleine Albright project. On September 30 he pondered whether the spiral was an appropriate symbol for an individual of high standard. We know that Max Frölich found the sign which is indeed the standard bearer of his life and career.

Helen W. Drutt English
January, 1998

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Pendant, 1990
gold, sterling, niello, moonstone, nylon cord
7/16 x 3 5/8 x 2 5/8"
Photograph by Jerry Anthony

Phillip Fike

American Metalsmith 1927–1997

Text by Jan Yager

When I sought out a writing project Metalsmith *proposed Phillip Fike, a founding member of SNAG, and resident of my childhood home of Detroit. I began my research by interviewing him while he was in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania accompanying his longtime companion Clare Morison at a wholesale craft show in January of 1997. He brought with him an oxygen tank, and a box full of metal ornament spanning fifty years. We both recognized the timeliness of this assignment, and as I proceeded with looking at the work and listening to him speak it grew in magnitude, worthiness, and urgency. We continued with hours of conversation on the telephone before I met him again at the SNAG conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico. In June I visited him for a day at the metals studios at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan and two more days with he and Clare in Hamtramck, and Grosse Pointe Park, examining his work, his slides, his photographs, and his papers.*

In a further attempt to grasp his lengthy artistic career I interviewed many of his friends, colleagues, current and former students and assembled a thirty page chronology from his various resumes, publications, archives, and personal recollections. This following is a portion of nearly sixty hours of conversation (in notes, audio and video tape) spanning the entire year. Though Fike did not live long enough to see this in print I hope these efforts begin to do justice to this pioneer of American Metalsmithing.

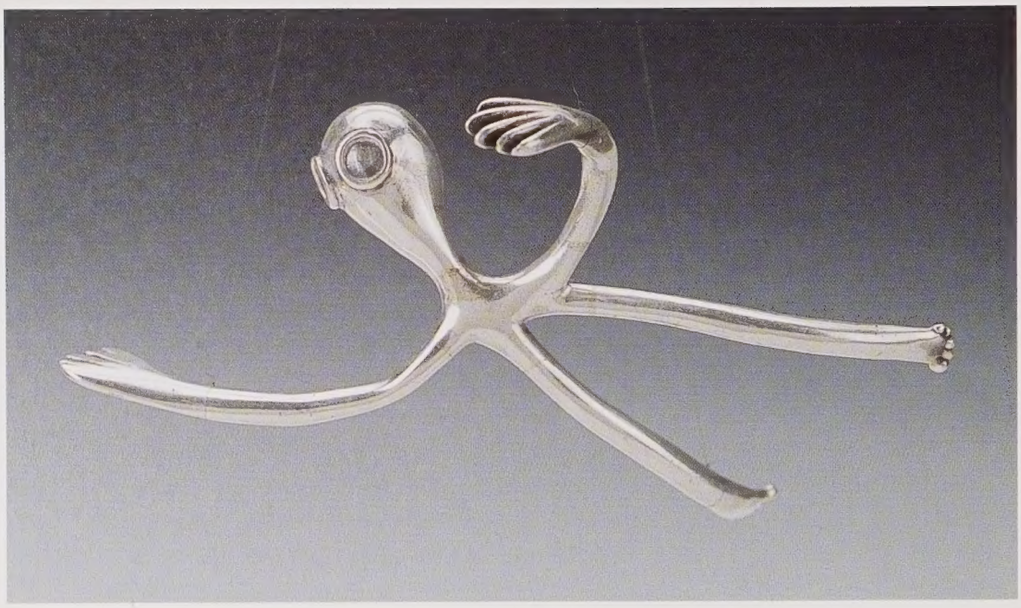
Since 1994 Fike suffered from Pulmonary Fibrosis (he suspected it was due to years of the inhalation of metal oxidizes from working in improper ventilation). He was on oxygen assistance nearly twenty-four hours a day. Regardless, he refused to retire, and continued teaching (he was approaching his forty-fifth year) and traveling with immense determination (he drove cross country to attend the SNAG conference and the National Ornamental Metal Museum's Annual Repair Days in a wheelchair). He died December 8, 1997, at the age of seventy, in Clare's studio. He is survived by Clare Morison of Grosse Pointe Park, Michigan, sons Peter of Reno, Nevada, Christopher of Bethel, Connecticut and four grandchildren. Address contributions to the Phillip Fike Memorial Fund, Department of Art and Art History, Attn: Steve Kram, Wayne State University, 150 Arts Building, Detroit, Michigan 48202. — Jan Yager

If you know anything about the fibula, ancestor of the common safety pin, you already know something about Phillip Fike. His name has been synonymous with the fibula for over thirty years. I discovered both at the 1975 "Uncommon Smiths" conference at Eastern Michigan University. Conference attendees were in the auditorium viewing slides, when a sinuous gold and ebony form appeared on the screen. At that same moment from the back of the room came the penetrating twang of an ancient instrument historically known as the Jew's Harp (which looks strikingly similar to a fibula). Someone whispered, "What was that?" Then another replied "That was Phillip Fike's Fabulous Fibula."[1]

> "The spectator viewing my work may assume from the character and quality of my pieces that I know what I'm doing, have known in the past, and know now where I might be going next with my future relatively predictable. My only claim to knowing has its source in believing I have been blessed with instinct about human things and unexpected encounters by chance to know them. Something like being in the arena at the right time and going forward until you've claimed the secrets of your instincts." – Phillip Fike, Artist Statement 1987

Phillip George Fike referred to himself as "a simple American metalsmith competing with the excellence of the past."[2] He has been described as "one of the more inspired artists of our generation."[3] Remarkably, Fike sustained growth as an artist, metalsmith, researcher, scholar, communicator, and educator for fifty years. Decade after decade he gained mastery over the creative process, and achieved the deepest possible understanding of a stunningly wide array of metalsmithing processes and materials. Spanning a full half century, his prolonged and profound quest for truth resulted in work of arresting aesthetic resolve.

Fike was one of the founders of the Society of North American Goldsmiths in 1968, and it was he who coined the acronym SNAG. The Wisconsin Designer Craftsmen Society established in 1916, was the first to recognize Fike's talents while he was a student at the University of Wisconsin. Beginning in 1949 he won awards at their annual fair in four consecutive years, and in 1950 he began entering other annual exhibitions. Within six years he had won awards in exhibitions sponsored by America House, the Museum of Contemporary Crafts, the Wichita Art Association, and the Detroit Institute of Arts. He exhibited at the Renwick Gallery, the Walker Art Center, and the Minnesota Museum of American Art. In the following decades his work was in *Objects USA*, *Copper 2*, *Good as Gold*, *Ferrous Finery*, *Goldsmith*, *Jewelry USA*, and *Platinum Jewelry Design*. The American Craft Museum, the National Ornamental Metal Museum, the Museum of Art in Toronto, and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London have shown his work. His last exhibition was *American Masters of Hollowware* at the Georgia Museum of Art. In 1970 Fike was listed as "among the [13] influential young contemporary jewelers in America"[4] and in 1988 he was elected to the American Craft Council College of Fellows.



Left
Swimmer, 1949–50
cast sterling
4¼ x 4¼ x 1"

Right
Bar Suspended Wheaters,
(ear ornaments), 1984
14k, 18k yellow and white gold
2½ x 4"

Photographs by Jerry Anthony

The middle of three sons, Phillip Fike was born on July 15, 1927 in Baraboo, Wisconsin, home of Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey circus. Recalling a difficult childhood he described his mother [Paula Lichte] as domineering and obsessed with the church, and his father Forrest as occupied with his role as a physician in rural Reedsburg, Wisconsin. His childhood pleasures were watching his grandfather carve wooden violin posts, playing golf, observing nature, and exploring his Uncle Walter's farm. Fike lamented that the threat of punishment nearly extinguished what he later referred to as his "instinctual attraction"[5] to the farm's iron forge. Still, by the age of ten he had attempted to mint a lead counterfeit fifty-cent piece, and he had succeeded in chiseling his name on a tombstone, under the tutelage of the master stone engraver at nearby Collins Monument Works. Metal craft was an integral part of Fike's education due to Miss Evelyn Bauman, his teacher at Madison West High School from 1942-1945. While her student he cast a ring in silver, raised a bowl in pewter, learned to engrave metal, and became aware of Scandinavian Modern silversmithing. His As were in Art Metal and Typing.

In April of 1945, directly out of high school, Fike enlisted in the U. S. Navy. Stationed at the Naval Air and Technical Training Command in Lakehurst, New Jersey, he tested, fabricated and rigged experimental parachutes. There he discovered his zeal for mechanics, but because he could type fast and accurately, he was assigned a desk job where he remained until the end of World War II. On a one week leave in July 1946, just before his planned re-enlistment, Fike traveled to western Massachusetts to visit his cousin, sculptor Norman Harms, who was attending Cummington Summer School of Art. Surrounded by artists, writers and poets for the first time, he realized that he "felt like them."[6] Then and there he decided to follow his instincts and pursue a life of art.

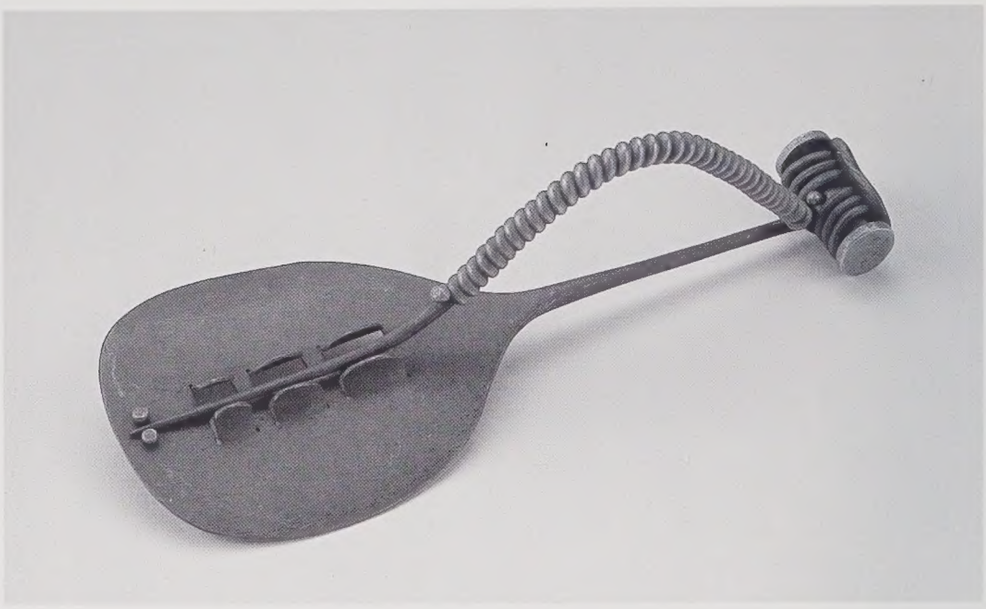
Under the sponsorship of the GI Bill Fike returned home to study Applied Art at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. He remembers Professor Arthur Vierthaler not for his teaching but for his gruff, forceful insistence that students develop their rendering skills and go to the library to find a topic worthy of research. Fike credits Henry Wilson's *Silver & Jewellery* (1942 2nd edition) with introducing him to niello and Professor James Watrous's hands-on Historical Art Processes class with providing the impetus to recreate it.

Niello is a method of decorating silver or gold objects by filling incisions on the metal with a paste made of copper, silver, lead, and a small bit of borax and heating it until the amalgam flows. Fike's first niello experiment in 1947 generated noxious fumes and caused the evacuation of the entire arts building. Regardless, his resulting brooch, inlayed with niello, earned him an *A*, won him his first award, and convinced the head of the department to install a much needed exhaust system. Fike said he "rapidly became known among craftsmen for his success with this difficult process ... [because] no one had ever seen it used in a contemporary mode."[7]

Phillip Fike earned his Master of Science degree in 1951 from the University of Wisconsin. His graduate show included niello work, engraving, fine wire work, and carved and inlaid ebony brooches, pendants, and small sterling silver castings. One abstract sculpture *Swimmer* depicted a begoggled figure, limbs akimbo, joyously navigating underwater. To achieve this pose with limited casting facilities he cast it in six parts and brazed it together.

After graduation, Fike worked at Liberty Powder Defense Corporation in Badgerville, Wisconsin. From 1951 to 1953 he supervised the machine milling of rocket ammunition cruciforms to precisely controlled tolerances. At the end of each day he walked back across the road, to the studio he had set up in the bathroom of his house, to create a portfolio of metalwork and ornaments which he hoped would establish his reputation and secure him a college level teaching position.

In 1953 Wayne University (now Wayne State University) in Detroit, Michigan, hired Fike to replace retiring English silversmith Arthur Nevill Kirk. Kirk, who taught at Wayne from 1933 to 1953, had influenced several generations of metalsmiths in the Detroit area since his appointment to Cranbrook Academy of Art in 1927. Because of Cass Technical High School,[8] Cranbrook Academy of Art, the Detroit Society of Arts and Crafts, the Michigan Silversmiths Guild, and Wayne University, an astounding number of people were studying jewelry and silversmithing. From 1948 to 1953 between twenty-one and forty-one percent of the entries in the annual *Exhibition for Michigan Artist-Craftsmen* at the Detroit Institute of Arts were classified "Metalwork" (on average eighty-one pieces per year). It is no wonder Fike described Detroit at the time of his arrival as a "hotbed of major metalsmithing."[9]



Detroit proved a potent brew. For forty-five years Fike's teaching position at Wayne University placed him within the "rich and varied life of the university,"[10] and within walking distance of the Detroit Institute of Arts, the Detroit Society of Arts and Crafts, the Detroit Historical Museum, and the Detroit Public Library, and a few miles away from the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village. And, to earn much needed extra income Fike transferred his mechanical drawing and tool and die skills to Detroit's automotive and defense industries.

Fike's first job at Designing Service Corporation from 1953 to 1955 was lathe cutting jigs and fixtures for the U. S. Air Force's B-52 bomber. Immediately, he acquired his own lathe and applied this process to the creation of his one piece *Cavex Cuff Links*. In a strikingly similar swords into plowshares transformation in the 1880's "a New Jersey jeweler and inventor, bought a machine [likely a swagger] that had made cartridge shells during the Civil War... [and] patented an adaptation of it for the manufacture of collar buttons and one-piece cuff links."[11] Fike designed his cuff links to resemble buttons when worn. Employing silver, gold, niello, and exotic woods, he made countless variations of "dumbbell" and cast "U" shape versions, before arriving at his most widely acclaimed lathe turned pair, comprised of discs of 14k gold and ebony or sometimes grenadilla wood. Each slice was graduated in size, drilled, tapped, and stacked one on top of the other onto a threaded gold shaft forming a catenoid or double ended funnel. Fike's aerodynamically re-configured dumbbell variants were strikingly unique. They have been described as "the purest form of problem solving ... this wonderful simple form that cut to the heart ... getting down the essentials, making it work, and making it visually compelling at the same time."[12] Fike is quoted as saying "When you bring engineering and aesthetics, or meaning, together as one – bare naked – you've got something powerful!"[13] Their bold profile, lack of mechanisms, and graphically precise inlays won awards, and came to embody his work in the 1950's. Forty years later they remain fresh and demonstrate Fike's genius for straddling the centuries – one foot firmly planted in historical precedent, and the other stepping forcefully into the future.

Fike's passion for integrating mechanisms is best seen in his unceasing obsession with the fibula, another body ornament that holds fabric in place. Fike began serious study of fibulae in 1965 during a sabbatical to study the collections of the museums in Rome and Florence. Seven years earlier in 1948 the Detroit Institute of Arts had mounted an *Exhibition of Ancient Italic and Etruscan Art* including three gold and six bronze fibulae. The DIA provided Fike with a letter of introduction that allowed him to handle, photograph, and extensively study fibulae in Italian museums. "It was then that I woke up to the fact that the fibula was such a great clasp, especially the Etruscan (Vulci, c. 700 B. C. E.). I came away saying I would devote the rest of my metalworking life to the study and making of them."[14]

Phillip Fike researched, recreated, and reinterpreted the structures and mechanics of fibulae when he made *Experimental Bow Formations with Seven Text Fibulae* in gold, gold-filled sterling silver, brass, bronze, stainless steel, iron, niello, and ebony. As Heikki Seppa noted, "... most of us made those fibula, but he [Fike] kept on making them in ever varying ways [and now] ... he has the advantage of knowing the function of the fibula, whereas in the historical writings it was never even mentioned."[15] And he wondered if it was possible to create a fibula "so important to the garment that when a lady takes it off she is naked?"[16] Eventually, he succeeded in unraveling the mystery of how to wind the inverted spring coil as seen in *Flower Fibula*.

By the mid 1960s Fike was also combining his interest in interlocking ring sets, wide pierced wedding bands, and juxtaposing multiple colors of gold. For this he devised a bi-metal casting process using 14k white, yellow, red, and 24k gold. He realized that by not brazing the metals together after they were cast, he could preserve the visually crisp edges of the castings, thus arriving at his unique *Interlocking Wedding Bands*. Made on commission, they ranged from geometric to organic reflecting the personality of the individual client. Each ring was made of two, three, and even four pieces that separated then locked back in place, in only one way, to create a Gimmal[17] or Puzzle Ring. Through these pieces Fike again revealed his genius for solving both aesthetic and technical issues with highly satisfying mechanical innovations.

Like many contemporary American jewelers, Fike explored wire and kinetics through his fibulae, neck pendants, and ear ornaments. He favored precision and bringing wire to its extreme. He

Left to right

Cloud Comb Seeded, 1977
mild steel, gold, silver
3¼ x 6⅜ x 6⅛"

Flower Fibula,
(inverted spring coil mechanism), 1980
mild steel, sterling, gold
2½ x 1⅝ x 6⅝"

Untitled: Three Individual Wedding Rings, (one dis-assembled, two inter-fitted), 1965-1997
14k white and yellow gold
3⅛ x 5/16"

Photographs by Jerry Anthony

would draw it to an exceedingly fine gauge, end it in a weighty ball, wrap it around a form, or forge it to its widest, longest, thinnest possible state. *The Orbiters* ear ornaments were so precisely balanced that once they started rotating they continued to spin, silently, almost musically, for two or more minutes. The fine gauge gold wire in his *Bar Suspended Wheaters* ear ornaments were planished to a thin foil. By rendering the work down to its essence "he [Fike] lets it breathe"[18] and exist as its most exquisite self.

Although metal and glass are pyrotechnical cousins few goldsmiths explore both mediums. Like René Lalique, Fike was led through research in metal to innovation in glass. Fike received his first brief but infectious introduction to glass in 1962, at Harvey Littleton's earliest hot glass shop in Verona Wisconsin. After that he said "it seemed absolutely essential that I do some serious work in glass."[19] The opportunity came in 1969-70 on an exchange with the University of California-Berkeley, where he first concentrated his training and research in glassblowing techniques with Marvin Lipofsky and others. His *Blown Birds* series of ovoid glass forms resembled breasts with nipples. To make them rock and jiggle and to conceal the punting scar left in the glass, Fike took molds of the undersides of the glass forms and cast a bronze bottom for each one. Eventually, he was forced to retain his focus exclusively on metal, though not without making a contribution to glass: he discovered that metal powders would adhere to hot glass when applied with a eutectic spray welder used in the auto industry.

While participating in Brent Kington's 1974 Iron Workshop at Fort Collins, Colorado, Fike "... finally woke up to the real truth that you can't ever have been much of a metalsmith if you weren't an iron worker." After establishing an iron forge at Wayne State University he said "I felt on track and the presence of the forge in the shop turns the place into a kind of temple."[20] A particularly important piece from his iron period is *Woven Pectoral Ornament,* in which Fike hot hammer forged four full leech forms that rapidly decrease in thickness and are woven together to form a flexible collar. This gimmal of iron tendrils is so masterfully resolved it appears to have grown in place. Pencil drawings for this piece reveal studied and precise measurements in thousandths of an inch to calculate the tapers. It is a fine example of the grace and fluidity attainable in those rare encounters when a master goldsmith manipulates hot iron.

Fike liked pairing his *Maiden,* a pewter and grenadilla wood teapot with *Knight,* his pewter, ebony, and gold teapot/pitcher so they could converse and create a charged atmosphere by association. The *Knight* is angular and erect, his *Maiden* is sinuous, bulbous, and suggestive. Fike shaped and carved these unabashedly male and female forms in hard wood and then married them to his metal work. He obviously enjoyed shaping wood as much as he did metal. His repeated practice of precisely stacking, inlaying, and laminating wood and metal in striped, tiled, diamond, and spinal cord type formations is the approach of a (wood) lapidarist. He considered himself a structuralist, allowing the form and the surface of a piece to reflect the process used in its making.

This system of designing was applied to countless variations of cuff links, pendants, fibulae, and several Academic Maces from the mid 1950s to the mid 1980s. The maces, descendants of the medieval battle club, were his largest and conceptually most complex works, "...endowed with symbols and a powerful presence, inspiring the spectator with evidence that human values of high purpose are protected."[21] The *Wayne State University Mace,* executed between 1981 and 1984, measures fifty-one inches long, and was comprised of 134 discs of carved ebony and bronze designed to rotate in seemingly endless random edge cut patterns.

While concurrently exploring other techniques, Fike continued his niello work throughout his career. This led to artistic innovation, the invention of specific tools, and a totally successful method of pouring his lustrous blue-black niello formula. Single-handedly he brought this process to life for American metalsmiths through workshops, and through the creation of his contemporary ornament. On a sabbatical in 1977 Fike spent time at the British Museum researching the history, the art, and the artist/goldsmiths who were niellists in 14th, 15th, and early 16th century Europe. He considered this research to be the most important of his career, and it prompted him to engrave the *Niello Compendium.* "The compendium describes formulae, manufacture and application of niello ... it is a poetic dialogue of select words revealing intimate process with fire, substances and tools."[22] It is engraved with a burin assisted by a stereo zoom microscope on a four by six inch plate of sterling silver. He described it as a "technical treatise ... a rare and poetic version ... hopefully touching and flowing mystically."[23] Since niel-

Left
Duck Fibula, (unfinished), 1996–97
cast 14k, 4⅜ x 1⅝ x 1"
Photograph by Jerry Anthony

lo is so closely associated with the invention of printmaking, it seemed fitting that Fike intended to pull an edition of prints "to secure his formulae and procedures, and to assure the continuance and spirit of alchemy."[24] before sealing it in niello.

Fike transmitted the importance of metalsmithing as a venue for making art and ornament. He spoke slowly, deliberately, eloquently, almost religiously, of the history, principles, practices, and powers of metalsmiths. His reverence for creativity, discovery, and the importance of personal quests was communicated to both new and advanced students. In 1983 he became the only member of the art faculty at Wayne State University to receive the college's "President's Award for Excellence in Teaching." "People have said I am a gifted with being a fine born teacher. It is a marvelous pleasure when you are in the presence of a student as they awaken to a concept ... when someone's life has been changed..."[25]

Fike estimated he taught over 3500 university students in his nearly forty-five years at Wayne. He introduced thousands more to Niello, The Comb, Fetishes, and the Ancient Clasps and Fibulae at lectures, workshops, and conferences throughout the country. Fike also spread his word further through his "handouts." These typed and hand printed missives on many topics were updated and revised many times. They were valued for their information, wit, wisdom, and provocative questions and they continue to be passed around by former students and colleagues. He had all kinds of rules. The "Rule of Three" (no artistic breakthroughs before the third try); "Painting is an Easy Art" (compared to metalsmithing); and "When in Doubt Use a Pearl" (a practice he regarded as the metalsmiths most common sin) are just three examples.

"The Ultimate Bench Pin" handout extolled the wooden bench pin as an essential multi-purpose tool that must be made by the metalsmith in scale with their own hand. He considered it *the* generative focal point of the metalsmith's workbench, and necessary for the fertilization of craftsmanship.[26] The first assignment he gave his students was to saw, file, and shape their own pin. (Fike made his first around 1957). Although he described it as "a noble tool, even in its simplest form,"[26] his pins often looked baroque. He believed it should function from all sides, and when mounted with a sturdy C-clamp, be rock solid and strong enough to stand on (both literally and figuratively). Fike's Ultimate Bench Pin in tandem with his Laptop Anvil enabled him to work, travel, and teach almost anywhere; on an airplane, in a hotel room, or in the back of a van. Fike's "never be without your tools" philosophy is in full force in his tongue in cheek, *All Sixteen Up Front,* a neck collar sawblade container, each tube containing a dozen jeweler's sawblades. Created for the *Great Sawblade Container Competition*, it was awarded the Grand Prize and exhibited at the Museum of Art in Toronto, Canada in 1985. It is representative of Fike's shared exuberance and zest for wit, invention, and mixed media.

For many summers Fike traveled to Ox-bow Summer School of Art in Saugatuck, Michigan to teach small metal sculpture. Established in 1910 as an artists' retreat, Fike often referred to it as his "spiritual home". There he and countless other artists gathered to rest, recharge, and cross pollinate. Still, his home base was always the commodious metal studios at Wayne University in Detroit. Fike maintained the studios as though they were his own, because they were. It may have been their classroom, but it was his only studio. "[Phillip] understood very, very early ... that if you are teaching something you have to grow at the same time, and sometimes even a bad experiment turns out to be very good, because there was that fine seed of advancement and discovery going on."[27]

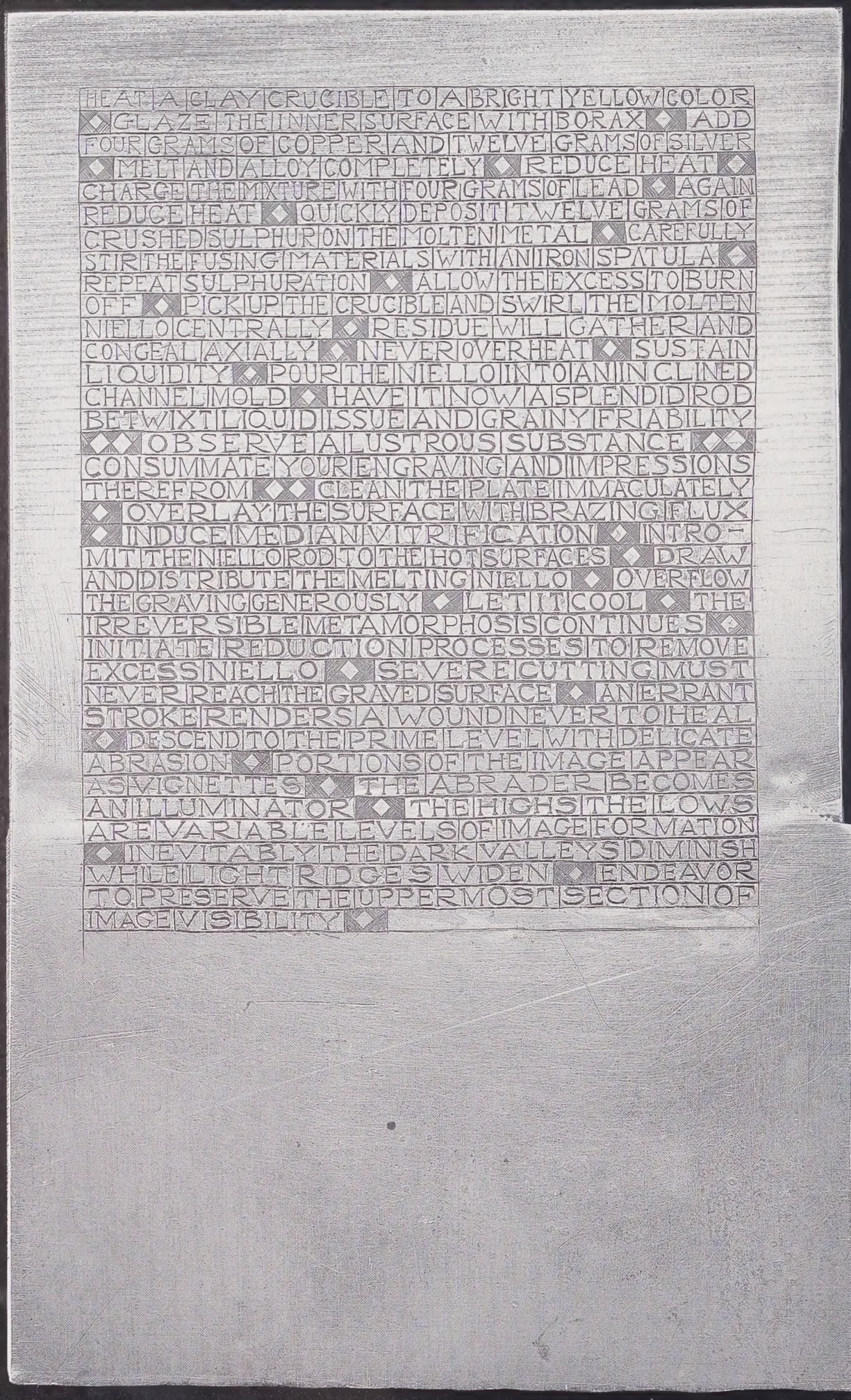
Many of Fike's students have sustained and extended his vision through their work in the marketplace, industry, and academia. Stanley Lechtzin, a student of Fike's from 1956-1960, spoke of Fike's "sense of artistic integrity ...[and how] he communicated very clearly the value of innovation, originality, finding one's own mode, and the necessity to establish it as quickly as possible."[28] His example "has led many to develop a stronger philosophical base for their own work."[29]

Throughout his life the multi-faceted Fike was a performer to the core. As a child he played violin for twelve years. He wrote poetry, sang opera, performed as a semi-professional folk singer, and co-founded the Michigan Classical Guitar Society. In metalsmithing circles he became legendary for his scholarly lectures delivered with a straight face, while wearing a Viking's helmet, an iron Cobra-snake headdress, or a gold Mayan nose ornament. Stories abound of his splitting the air with his notorious imitation of a lion's roar to unsettle and penetrate a classroom, or silence a crowded restaurant. His unrealized dream was to forge, tune, and then perform upon a Jew's Harp, all before an audience.

Phillip Fike clearly is both a product of and contributor to the abundance of metalsmithing in the Great Lakes region - what I now consider "The North" or "The Third Coast." Wisconsin's early leadership in crafts due to the efforts of Miss Evelyn Bauman, Emil Kronquist, Elsa Ulbricht, Madeline Tourtelot, the Milwaukee Vocational School, the Wisconsin Designer Craftsmen Society, and

Right
Maiden, (a teapot pitcher), 1980–1987
pewter and grenadilla wood
5⅜ x 3⅜ x 10½"

Below
Experimental Bow Formations (with seven test Fibulae), 1965–1990
stainless steel, brass,
and goldfilled wire, ebony
Average 1 x 4 x 2"
Photograph by Jerry Anthony


HEAT A CLAY CRUCIBLE TO A BRIGHT YELLOW COLOR
◇ GLAZE THE INNER SURFACE WITH BORAX ◇ ADD
FOUR GRAMS OF COPPER AND TWELVE GRAMS OF SILVER
◇ MELT AND ALLOY COMPLETELY ◇ REDUCE HEAT ◇
CHARGE THE MIXTURE WITH FOUR GRAMS OF LEAD ◇ AGAIN
REDUCE HEAT ◇ QUICKLY DEPOSIT TWELVE GRAMS OF
CRUSHED SULPHUR ON THE MOLTEN METAL ◇ CAREFULLY
STIR THE FUSING MATERIALS WITH AN IRON SPATULA ◇
REPEAT SULPHURATION ◇ ALLOW THE EXCESS TO BURN
OFF ◇ PICK UP THE CRUCIBLE AND SWIRL THE MOLTEN
NIELLO CENTRALLY ◇ RESIDUE WILL GATHER AND
CONGEAL AXIALLY ◇ NEVER OVERHEAT ◇ SUSTAIN
LIQUIDITY ◇ POUR THE NIELLO INTO AN INCLINED
CHANNEL MOLD ◇ HAVE IT NOW A SPLENDID ROD
BETWIXT LIQUID ISSUE AND GRAINY FRIABILITY
◇◇ OBSERVE A LUSTROUS SUBSTANCE ◇◇
CONSUMMATE YOUR ENGRAVING AND IMPRESSIONS
THEREFROM ◇◇ CLEAN THE PLATE IMMACULATELY
◇ OVERLAY THE SURFACE WITH BRAZING FLUX
◇ INDUCE MEDIAN VITRIFICATION ◇ INTRO-
MIT THE NIELLO ROD TO THE HOT SURFACES ◇ DRAW
AND DISTRIBUTE THE MELTING NIELLO ◇ OVERFLOW
THE GRAVING GENEROUSLY ◇ LET IT COOL ◇ THE
IRREVERSIBLE METAMORPHOSIS CONTINUES ◇
INITIATE REDUCTION PROCESSES TO REMOVE
EXCESS NIELLO ◇ SEVERE CUTTING MUST
NEVER REACH THE GRAVED SURFACE ◇ AN ERRANT
STROKE RENDERS A WOUND NEVER TO HEAL
◇ DESCEND TO THE PRIME LEVEL WITH DELICATE
ABRASION ◇ PORTIONS OF THE IMAGE APPEAR
AS VIGNETTES ◇ THE ABRADER BECOMES
AN ILLUMINATOR ◇ THE HIGHS THE LOWS
ARE VARIABLE LEVELS OF IMAGE FORMATION
◇ INEVITABLY THE DARK VALLEYS DIMINISH
WHILE LIGHT RIDGES WIDEN ◇ ENDEAVOR
TO PRESERVE THE UPPERMOST SECTION OF
IMAGE VISIBILITY ◇

***Niello Compendium*, 1977–78, sterling plate, $^{65}/_{100}$ x $5^{1}/_{16}$ x $3^{7}/_{8}$", Photograph by Jerry Anthony**

the Milwaukee Handicraft Project, (which shifted the focus of the federal WPA programs toward crafts) and many others spawned a wave of talented artists, metalsmiths, teachers, writers, curators, patrons, and industrial designers.

Fike upheld Scandinavian Modern standards of craftsmanship, while studying the ancient masterworks. Without the advantage of the eons he sought to decipher and build upon the past. "You can't get a big head when you compete with the masters... much of their mastery is impossible to achieve, and one must simply praise the greatness of the past."[30] He repeated processes endlessly, until they became effortless, until they "flowed". "Only when everything is flow can you get in harmony with the plastic possibilities of your tool. Only at that point is there the possibility of bringing it to new territory, and making it your own."[31]

Economic necessity compelled Fike to hone his skills in the defense and automotive industries. As a result, he was one of the first contemporary American studio jewelers to reject naive, crude workmanship and instead execute subtle feats of engineering. The university environment fueled his intellectual curiosity, and propelled his research and understanding of metalsmithing. Rather than ransack history he chose to pick up where they left off. Early on, he established a sure-footed method of working and he adhered to it faithfully. His slow, studied, incremental growth, built upon the classics and compounded over fifty years proved to be his most potent formula.

Phillip George Fike's philosophical underpinnings, long range vision, deep commitment to research, and interest in technology created a uniquely American brand of metal work and ornament; work which is reflective of its time and place, yet saturated with historical understanding and artistic vision. His taste for structural purity, coupled with his Wisconsin roots, assured he was a original through and through, a never repeatable amalgam of artist, engineer, metalsmith, scholar, teacher, and communicator.

His last piece, in progress at the time of his death, harks back to his first. *Duck Fibula* seems to say it all. It calls attention to the noble fibula, the amazingly versatile duck, and the sure hand of a master metalsmith. "The duck is special because it can walk on the land, swim in the water, swim under the water, feed under water, fly in the air, migrate intercontinentally, and mate for life". Even unfinished, cast in 14k gold, the sight of this piece made me catch my breathe, just as I did when I saw my very first and still unforgettable Etruscan duck fibula, dusted in granulation in a museum in Rome. Like the Etruscans Fike learned so much from, the artist revered all living forms and shared a deep kinship with them. It seems fitting that the amazingly multi-talented duck, just like Fike, should march on forever after on the rib of his final fibula.

Fike cultivated a deep sense of wonder for the vast and mysterious continuum of which we all are a part. He dedicated his metalsmithing career to advancing our understanding of niello, the fibula, the inverted spring coil, the comb, bi-metal casting, and the sheer beauty of engineering. The farther he looked back in time, the greater he could see forward, instinctively sensing that one needs to know history in order to create it.

Phillip Fike deserves to claim his place among metalsmithing's Modern Masters. His work will continue to inspire generation after generation of metalsmiths. They should be allowed the opportunity to see and handle his work, just as I did his, and as he did the Etruscan works that inspired his life's work. In a speech at the 1981 SNAG conference he said "I wish to thank all of my forebears, or those mysterious forces back there, and now all of the new Gods, or whatever these life surging qualities can be called, for saving me to have this time in orbits."[33]

> "It shall become clear that I am fated, and consequently so [are] my interested associates, to be unable to say or write what I profess to know the same identical way as time proceeds. The individual caught up in this art and its practice may use this information freely, with my wish being only that they give generous latitude to alchemy herein. May the adventures prevail and be shared by all." – Phillip Fike[34]

The author wishes to thank Fike's many friends, colleagues, and current and former students, who agreed to be interviewed, and the librarians and archivists who assisted in this project, and in particular Marian Pritchard.

Jan Yager is a fulltime artist/metalsmith living in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Notes

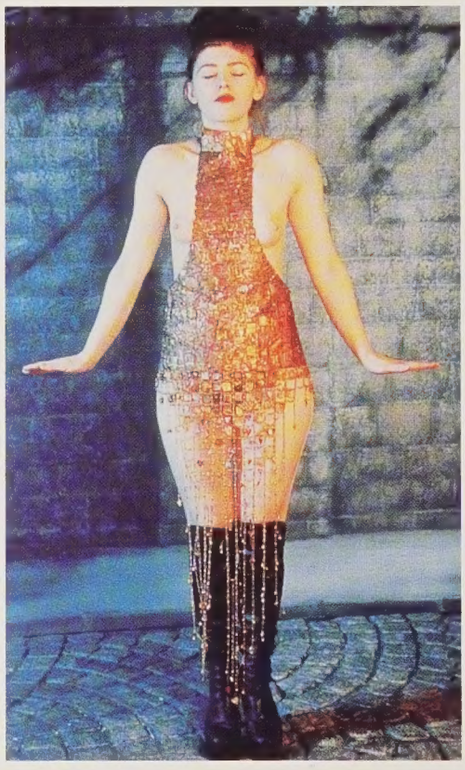
[1] This same alliteration "slipped off the tongues of students" every time Albert Paley showed Fike's slides to his students at the Rochester Institute of Technology, c. 1970. Author's conversation with Sharon Church, March 3, 1997.
[2] Author's taped conversations with Phillip Fike, April-October 1997.
[3] Author's conversation with Mary Ann Scherr, May 1997.
[4] Philip Morton, *Contemporary Jewelry: A Craftsman's Handbook*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1970), p. 37.
[5] Author's conversations with Phillip Fike.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Cass Technical High School had three metals teachers (Greta Pack, Louise Green, and Mary Davis) in 1936 when Harry Bertoia graduated with a scholarship to go to the Detroit Society of Arts and Crafts School. He then won one to Cranbrook Academy of Art where he re-established Kirk's shop and began to teach metalwork in 1939. (Bertoia's Chronology).
[9] Author's conversations with Phillip Fike.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Susan Jonas Marilyn Nissenson, *Cuff Links*, (New York, 1991), 13.
[12] Author's taped conversation with Fred Fenster, June 6, 1997.
[13] Charles Sercombe, *The Citizen*, (Hamtramck, Michigan. Feb. 5, 1987).
[14] Author's conversations with Phillip Fike.
[15] Author's conversation with Heikki Seppa, June 4, 1997
[16] Gary Griffin, Taped interview with Phillip Fike, 1973, Tyler School of Art, Metalsmith Archives, Elkins Park, PA.
[17] George Frederick Kunz, *Rings for the Finger* (1945), pp. 219-220.
[18] Author's conversation with Sharon Church.
[19] Author's conversations with Phillip Fike.
[20] Robert L. Cardinale, *Copper 2. The Second Copper, Brass, and Bronze Exhibition*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Museum of Art, 1980), pp. 18-19.
[21] Phillip Fike, Artist Statement, (April 9, 1996).
[22] Phillip Fike, Notes with the Photograph, (November 1997).
[23] Author's conversation with Fike.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Fike's "Ultimate Bench Pin Handout".
[27] Author's taped interview with Heikki Seppa.
[28] Author's taped interview with Stanley Lechtzin and Vicki Sedman, (March 21, 1997).
[29] Stanley Lechtzin, "My Teacher- A Tribute" (December 11, 1997). Read at a service honoring Fike in Detroit, Michigan, December 11.
[30] Author's conversations with Fike.
[31] Ibid.
[33] Phillip Fike speech at SNAG Conference, (1981).
[34] Phillip Fike, Niello Workshop Handout, (Portland Maine, November, 1990)

Charlotte Meyer

Text by Nancy Megan Corwin

Charlotte Meyer's main body of work resulted from her study of the red light district of Amsterdam. Her night-time forays to photograph this borderline society were risky, depressing, and enlightening. The subsequent pieces – strapped, bound, enhanced, and ornamented bodices and dresses – in many cases reflect this dangerous edge. An edge that related to her own life and to the marginalized existence of those she studied.

Charlotte's forms wrap the female in chain mail, heavy metal straps, chased and ornamented sheets of metal, and delicately fabricated squares of silver. The ghost-like quality of what is missing is potent in Charlotte's work. Armor encased torsos are often padlocked in some way. *Charming* is a lovely vest of constructed silver units chained together. There are boxes of chocolates, filigree gates, a square of key holes, a window through which we glimpse a nude woman, and a tiny padlock covering the heart. In *Dance* the hinged metal torso is locked from behind. In *On The Surface* the lock hangs below a chased metal vest suggesting the weightiness of the garment, and a chaste enclosure for the chest, the heart, the whole woman.



In her most recent work, seemingly endless chains are hung from ceiling to floor. With this chain, sometimes attached, sometimes separate, are elongated bulbous glass vials, distorted from heating and pulling. The vials hold found objects that include flower parts, seeds, and metal. Though not physically defining the female form, the piece embodies the more intimate aspects of the previous work and describes an internal struggle with memory and pain, captured in clear glass and hanging in space. The chains are made with a meticulousness that forces the viewer to consider the technical process as well as the painstaking repetition of constructing and connecting the tiniest details of an individual's history. The resulting installation is like a glass screen. We need some yet invisible key to open the last padlock.

Below, left
Chastity, 1992
copper, brass, Chinese shim
60 x 30"

Below
Dance, 1996
bronze, found objects, tulle
15 x 34 x 7"

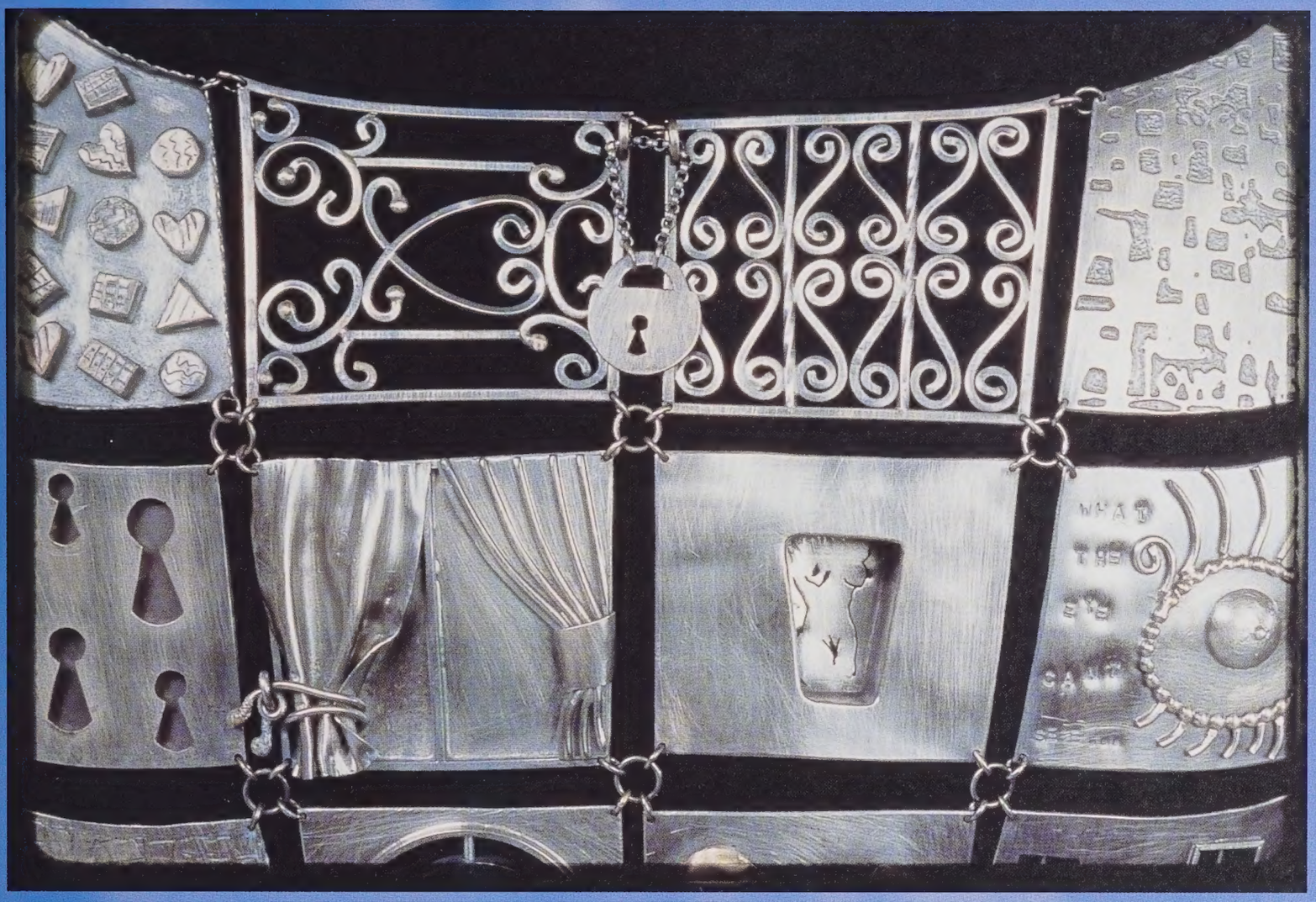
Right, clockwise from top

Charming, (detail) 1996
sterling, fine silver, 10k
11 x 17 x 6"

Screen 2: Eroticism, 1997
glass, steel, aluminum, bronze
78 x 96"

Charming, 1996
sterling, fine silver, 10k
11 x 17 x 6"

Desire, 1996
steel, stainless
14 x 58 x 7"



Vernacular of the Sacred

Laminae Ex Voto in Southern Italy

TEXT BY KATE WAGLE

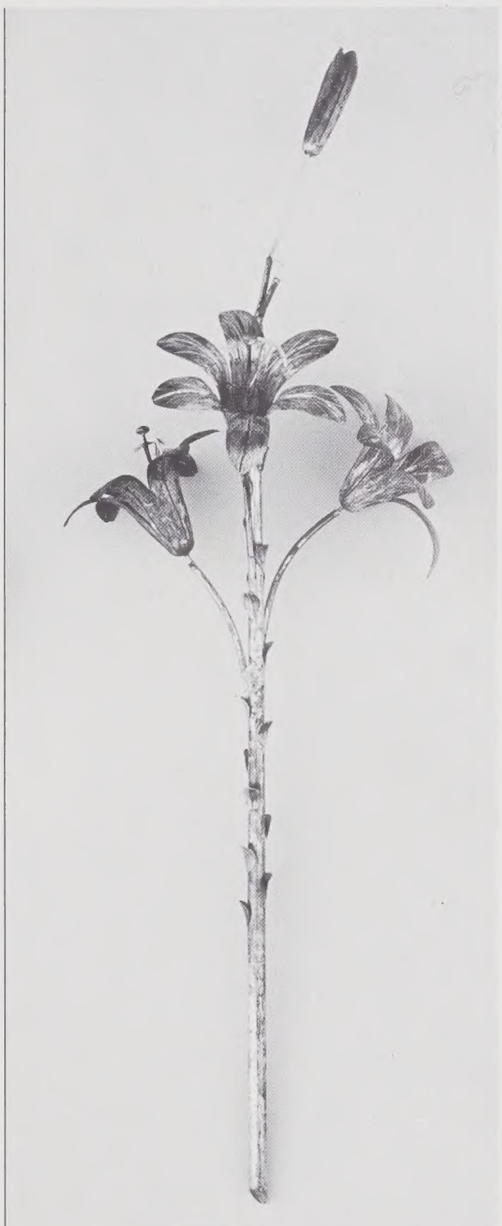
Votives are objects offered to a deity in exchange for favor and in the cultures of southern Italy and Sicily, anything can be *ex voto.* Not subject to liturgical rules, these offerings are made "according to the inspiration and the personal culture of the devotee," and so defined as "popular religiosity" (Caggiano 39). These *ex voto* can be as ephemeral as rose petals or as solidly precious as a fabricated silver bouquet. The profusion and variety of such *ex voto* at the Sanctuary of Madonna dell' Rosario in Pompeii is only partially visible. "If all the gifts brought to the sanctuary *ex voto* in the course of this century were hung on the walls...the devotees would have one of the richest and most extraordinary visions of contemporary times. The sanctuary would be completely covered in jewels and ingots, watches and chains, paintings and chests, photographs and weapons, written texts and crutches, forming one of the most splendent extraordinary surfaces constructed with all of the visual forms of contemporary communication with the sacred" (Caggiano et al 94).[1]

Votive practices are common in many cultures, from the Latin American Milagro to the Japanese Ema (DeForest).[2] The custom was "common in the classical era", where it was "already considered ancient rituals" (Trupia 10). "When Naples was a Greek colony the walls of a temple built there by Egyptian worshippers of Isis were covered inside and out by tablets bearing inscriptions or paintings, nailed or plastered to the walls in thanks for favors received. Most of them were put up by sailors who had survived disasters at sea" (Puntillo 27). The Sabellic peoples practiced *ver sacrum,* a votive made to avert natural disaster or war on behalf of all of the humans and other creatures predicted to be born on their land the following spring. The *devotio,* practiced by the Romans, offered a life in sacrifice "in order to obtain in compensation the enemy's defeat" (Trupia 10). In Italy the Latin term *ex voto* is an abbreviation of *ex voto suscepto,* (according to the promise that was made). While widely practiced throughout Europe until recent times, the "custom has nearly disappeared, except in Italy, Crete, Greece, Sicily, and the Andalusia, Catalonia, and Mallorca areas in Spain" (Egan 12).[3]

Due primarily to their personal and communicative nature, the *ex voto* amassed by various sanctuaries give us a rich picture of the cultures of their origins and offer insights into the function and strategies of a vernacular based art.

A newsletter, the *Bulletin,* documents more than 100 years of offerings. Published by Bartolo Longo, founder of the Sanctuary at Pompeii, it is a moving testimony to the history, culture and emotional life of this vital community surrounding the site. In the entries accounts of the miraculous are expressed in the language of factual reportage and include the testimonials of grace that accompanied *ex voto* offerings from around the world:

> "1894...Mr. Vincenzo Enrico, a building constructor in Naples, is always present in our memory for having encouraged us both morally and materially. When we were perplexed at the start of the Works for the Sons of Prisoners, he placed his substantial offering of six thousand lire in our hands in order to obtain grace for his recovery. He was graced and we began the Works..."[4](37) and; "From Dindigal, India, 1899...a young Indian girl had swallowed three strychnine pellets intended for rat extermination ...Miss Mary Higgins, an active zealot of the Virgin of Pompeii, with the parents permission (Protestants ...compelled by their love for their little girl in danger of her life, they were prepared to promise anything...), made the child swallow a rose petal blessed in the Sanctuary of the Valley of Pompeii...the very same night the little girl was fine...Father Levaux" (34).



LEFT
Laminae ex voto,
Madonna dell'Rosario, Pompeii.

ABOVE
Silver bouquet,
Madonna dell'Rosario, Pompeii.

TOP
Collected *ex voto*,
Madonna dell'Arco, San Anastasia.

ABOVE
Ex voto with hypodermic needles,
Madonna dell'Arco, San Anastasia.

RIGHT, TOP
Laminae ex voto, color litho with silver *ex voto, for graces received by Schioppo Vincenzo (age 5) and Schioppo Salvatore (age 8)*,
Madonna dell'Rosario, Pompeii.

RIGHT, BOTTOM
ex voto, Madonna dell'Rosario, Pompeii.

In each town the physical and visual aspects of the *ex voto* reflect the idiosyncrasies of the local histories and environments. For example, petitioners come from throughout the city and countryside to the sanctuary of Monte Pellegrino in Palermo, Sicily, dedicated to Santa Rosalia. "*Ex voto* in silver are found everywhere: the most ancient already gathered in windows and glass showcases, laid around the simulation of the saint or hung in disorderly fashion on the most recent walls" (Trupia 10). Ancient clay tablets with renderings of figures and body parts which originated in Mediterranean cultures still remain a strong influence in the sea-hemmed and history-infused regions of southern Italy, and are directly connected to the function and imagery of contemporary *laminae ex voto*, embossed metal sheets which are produced both by machine and by hand. Examples from southern Italy are highly detailed and beautifully formed. The *laminae ex voto* evolved during the seventeenth century and most date from the nineteenth (Tripputi).

At Monte Pellegrino most *ex voto* are *laminae* with embossed eyes, nose, ears, arms, hands, fingers, legs (with and without feet), feet, abdomens, breasts, torsos, genitals, esophagus, lungs, kidneys, vertebral columns, and uteruses. While factory-stamped versions are numerous, hand-crafted models predominate. The local population of devotees seeking authenticity, and valuing hand-worked *ex voto* have hired silversmiths in the Castellamare district. These smiths of Palermo are descended from a prestigious artisan tradition dedicated to *Argintaria* (crafting *ex voto*) since the 11th century. In an odd inversion, poverty dictates the richness of the expression. "The greater the initial state of privation, the greater the entity of the gift will have to be...symbol of the opulence which springs up, for all to see, from the daily poverty" (Trupia 12).

Located at the foot of Mount Vesuvius, the Sanctuary of Madonna dell'Arco in San Anastasia, outside of Naples, dates to 1450, when, it was reported, a frescoed image of the Madonna was struck with a wooden ball which caused it to bleed. By 1500 the church held hundreds of wax, human hair, and metal *ex voto*. Miracles at each site are at the center of the rituals and activities that bring concentrations of *ex voto*. Madonna related miracles are particularly numerous and evince the prevalence of Marian cults. Another legend suggests that this particular Madonna could be ruthless and her miracles not always beneficial; "After a skeptical woman deliberately stepped on and destroyed the wax eye offered as an *ex voto* by her husband, her feet fell off. They were subsequently preserved in the sanctuary and exhibited in a wire cage ever since 1590 (Puntillo 31).

Most of the *ex voto* currently displayed at Madonna dell'Arco are nineteenth and twentieth century hand-made and mass-produced sheet silver reliefs of every scale and description. One major section contains images of and pertaining to wars. Some areas are also organized by similarity: children, hands, arms, and horses, while others depend on the chronological dates of the offerings. Enormous wood tympanums are densely filled with arrangements of *laminae ex voto*; figures, legs, hands, and hearts, both identical and varied, which have been placed at the direction of the priests.

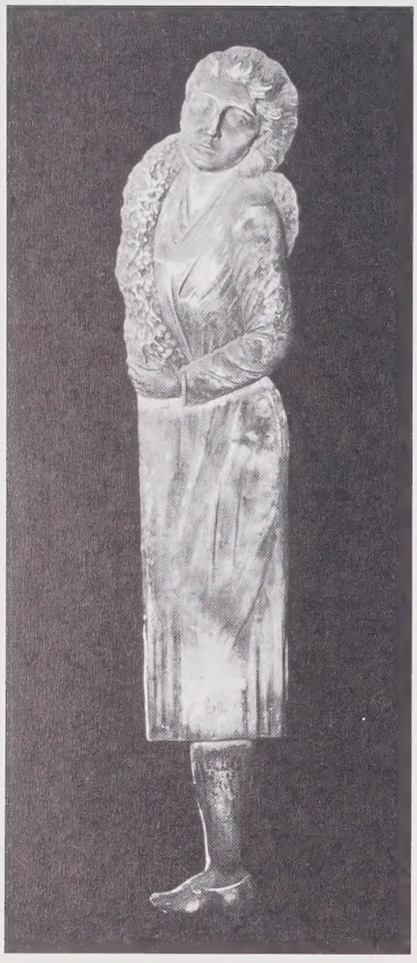
150,000 pilgrims come from all over southern Italy to the annual Feast of Madonna dell'Arco, singing, shouting, and dancing according to ancient rituals to actively pursue connection with divinity. "Despite official vetoes, these rituals are still practiced, evading the strict surveillance of the Dominican friars who have been in charge of the sanctuary for the past 500 years" (Puntillo 28).[7]

In contrast, the nearby Sanctuary of Madonna dell'Rosario in Pompeii was constructed from 1876 to 1887 to be a dignified manifestation of the wealth and rationality of the industrial age.[8] Madonna dell'Rosario was conceived as a missionary work "where the rich and noble families of Naples could worship together with the local farmers" (Puntillo 33). The poverty-burdened peasant culture still "in contact with the remains of paganism springing from the fields of the ancient Pompeii" (Caggiano et al 86), tested the limits of the church's ideological tolerance, which disapproved of the offerings of braids, wax feet, and eyes that were favored by the indigenous population. This merger of belief systems produced a tradition that: "[belongs to the] industrial age, connected in its moments of foundation, diffusion, and stabilization with the logic of industrialism's system of information" (Caggiano et al 53) and is simultaneously a part of the Marian cult which is anchored in an iconographic tradition which owes much to pre-christian paganism.

Per Cresima Ricevuta a Schieffo Vincenzo di Anna (5) 15/10/1972

Per Cresima Ricevuta a Schiaffo Salvatore di Anna (8) 15/6/1972

Giovanni Prospoli
ed Ermelinda Esposito
rendono grazie a Te
Consolatrice dei miseri
e Regina delle Vittorie
per aver guarita da epilessia
la loro cara figlia Giuseppa
Italia 8 Febbraio 1924



An illustration of this dual nature is offered in a business-like description of the Record of Graces (the miracles attributed to the portrait of the Madonna of the Rosary transported, by cart from Naples in 1875): "...if we look at the figures on a three yearly basis, we can see that an average of 4 graces per year are documented between 1876 and 1878, which soon become 38 between 1879 and 1881, 438 between 1882 and 1884, and an astonishing 1,119 per year between 1885 and 1887, with consequent, striking increases in the percentages for each 3 year period: 950% (1879-1881), 1,152% (1882-1884) and then dropping to a more moderate rate, stabilizing after the initial boom" (Tripputi 111). These figures are attributed not just to the miraculous powers of the icon but to the wide distribution and popularity of Longo's *Bulletin* which encouraged even more *ex voto*.

Ex voto from 1887 on are visible in several areas of the Madonna dell'Rosario (Caggiano).[9] More than three thousand *laminae,* repeated versions of silver hearts, figures, and body parts, are arranged in eight lunettes around the transept, placed there by nuns when the sanctuary was restructured in 1939. A gallery of glass cases houses mostly three-dimensional objects which include life-sized, cast silver infants. In the fluorescent-lit halls are an extraordinary collection of highly personalized offerings in frames and cases. These presentations of silver sheets, paintings, photographs, embroidery, fabric, human hair and objects, often organized into collages, offer insights into the history of this community and of the *laminae ex voto*. All are evidence that:

> "the new world of the devotees was different from the ancient one and powerfully exposed to industrialism's new means of communication – photography, magazines, the first forms of publicity, and above all, the astonishing hyper production of objects. This tradition was itself to make use of materials, techniques, and icons for its *ex voto*, from the new catalog offered by this great artificial nature being constructed by industrial society" ([10]Caggiano et al 54).

The Industrial Revolution introduced numerous changes into the physical and visual aspects of these collections. While the mass production of stylized human figures, body parts, inner organs, animals, plants, and personal items was possible by the middle ages, the *ex voto* still were primarily cast or worked by hand.

> "Man-made artifacts could always be imitated by men. Replicas were made by pupils in practice of their craft, by masters for diffusing their works, and, finally, by third parties in pursuit of gain. Mechanical reproduction of a work of art, however represents something new. Historically, it advanced intermittently and in leaps at long intervals, but with accelerated intensity" (Benjamin 220).

The thin sheets of silver used in the production of votive objects (*laminae)* are produced by industrial rolling mills in modern facilities. In the 18th and 19th centuries Italian silver, including religious objects that were being produced in quantity in southern Italian workshops, was "still more decorative and extravagantly ornamental" (Stobart 57) than that produced by northern European craftsmen. This decorative influence combined with the various stylistic revivals that have proliferated in this era, are still evident in the elaborate and stylized images of contemporary *laminae ex voto.* (The sanctuary at Pompeii may have as many as 10,000 repetitions of some forms.) Flat silver *ex voto* began to be industrially produced around 1880[11](Petagna). Though many continue to be hand-made using traditional repoussé techniques, the low relief of the sheet form is particularly adaptable to production stamping processes. Industrial production of *laminae ex voto* is centered primarily in northern Italy, while individual craftspeople still produce commissioned works in the south.

In Palermo silversmiths, embossers, goldsmiths, and engravers are responsible for seven phases of a sequence. The fusion, which alloys 1000 grams silver to 250 grams copper (significantly lower than the sterling-level standard set by Frederick II in the 13th century), is followed by lamination, shaping, embossment, refinishing, silvering, and polishing referred to as "the miracle" (Trupia 27–33).

The artisan and the devotee participate in an intense collaboration of craft and content. The craftsperson's skills are engaged on several levels: technical processes, knowledge of a codified catalog of references provided by traditional forms, and as a confidante as the silversmith offers "his interested attention to the story" of his client. In this remarkable interaction "the devoted speaks of himself without reserve," and the artisan and client are united in "solidarity and complicity" in opposition to the church's "persecutorial attitude"[12] toward the *ex voto* tra-

dition (Trupia 13). The process is prolonged, with multiple visits to monitor progress and make changes. The artisan and patron cooperate to apply the silversmith's expertise onto an object that manifests the devotee's deep spiritual response to a miraculous event.

The personal nature of this process has impacted the gradual evolution and alteration of the traditional metal forms. The details of a particular narrative can be readily integrated by the silversmith with a fluidity unavailable in industrial production. However, industrial forces still pose an important issue. Mechanically produced and hand-formed silver *ex voto* have exhibited similar changes in recent years. Since the factory can quickly adopt an artisan's modification and reproduce it on a large scale, it is impossible to identify authorship of most innovations. In turn, the silversmith is equally likely to appropriate a manufacturor's innovation. Despite this blurring of the lines of influence, some major trends can be identified. Earlier works include more hand-crafted, detailed, large-scale sheet objects fabricated of silver and occasionally gold. A life-size woman and small child of hammered silver are stunning examples from the sanctuary in Pompeii. The personal immediacy of the figures suggest portraiture rather than stylization, and the marks of hammers and tools are used with great facility to model in relief and render subtle details. Later examples tend to be mechanically produced, hand-sized forms of silver plated alloys. It is difficult to generalize regarding the quality of industrially stamped *laminae* over time. Even two mechanically produced samples of the same image, both available for contemporary purchase, evince differences in imagery and workmanship. In these pieces both the materials, one sterling and the other plated, and the die-maker's skill in rendering details of hair and subtleties of modeling, demonstrate an obvious range of outcomes via industrial processes. Recently *laminae* have been incorporated into collage formats. "With industrialism, the symbolic object began to count above all, as the precious materials slowly became property of the masses, and therefore no longer objects of particular worth" (Caggiano et al 79).

While the forms may be symbolic, the subjects depicted are, "sensible things...objects" (Caggiano) not aesthetic, but functional. Different parts of the actual body such as hair or gallstones are equally precious. Historically, the source of much *laminae ex voto* imagery is the belief that fragments of the devotee's body are the most personal gift, a testimonial to the impossible which has taken place. At the turn of the century the *new Madonna* at Pompeii was offered "the equivalent weight in silver of the child who had recovered by means of blessing, and devotees nailed thin silver sheets to the wall reproducing the parts of the body struck by illness" (Caggiano et al 53).[13] The silver infant was produced by skilled workers and followed an ancient custom of the devout traditions. The weight of the blessed was in this instance silver, but the practice did not exclude other materials: "some groups offered their weight in cheese and meat, bread and vegetables" (Caggiano et al 76).

The metal sheets are signs of the disease, the sick part of the body "auspiciously detached from the body of the devotee and displayed in the sacred place where they could no longer harm, crystallized in the incorruptible material" (Caggiano et al 76). Many elements of this symbolic body have survived intact from ancient cultures and reference very diverse devotional practices. The body is depicted in three different modes:

> "the body of small parts and of internal organs – eyes, lips, breasts, kidneys, lungs, intestines, hands and feet; the body of large parts – the head, chest, back, abdomen, legs and arms; and the body of the entire figure. Almost all these parts refer to a popular ancient anatomy and are synecdoche – parts put for the whole – of illnesses that have struck a zone. The more specialized anatomic details, as the kidneys, the lungs or the intestines, are of more recent design" (Caggiano et al 77).

The heart however, does not necessarily indicate an organ, but is an emblem of sacrifice, recurring throughout the history of the Christian tradition. Appearing in *ex voto*, it occurs in pictures, tied to cut braids, baby ribbons, photographs, and other contextual materials. Other common images include houses, horses, food, and animals. Some vehicles are also part of the collections of *laminae*.

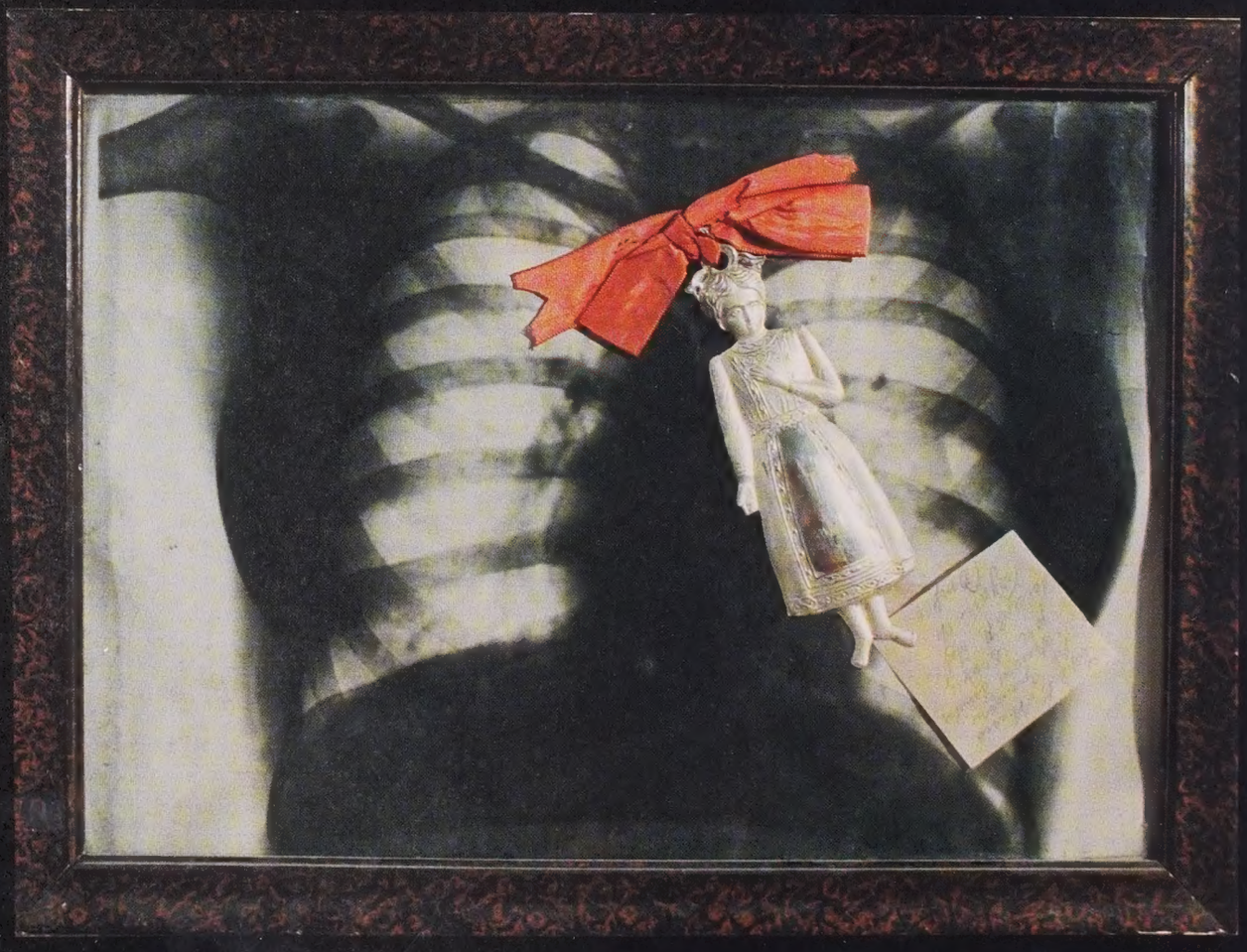
Complete figures are often used. Two recurring types of female figures are distinguished chronologically by dress and attitude. Another male, drapery-clad child is visually linked to antiquity. Others wear suits and military uniforms. Newly manufactured soldier *laminae* still wear old uniforms – the vocabulary of war seems not to require a specific time frame. At Madonna dell'Arco a number of *ex voto* incorporate beautifully fabricated gold hypodermic needles, visual testimony to a deliverance from drug-addiction.

ABOVE
Ex voto of man genuflecting, Italy, (date and specific location of origin unknown)
Gorga Collection, Museo Nazionale delle Arti e Tradizione Popolare, Rome.

LEFT, TOP
Woman, for grace received by Francesco Pisapia, Madonna dell' Rosario, Pompeii. 150 cm.

LEFT, BOTTOM
Child, for grace received by Francesco Pisapia, Madonna dell' Rosario, Pompeii. 58 cm.

Bombardati da tutte le
più volte cadevano da 3000
1915



Old forms are increasingly combined with new materials. Since the proliferation of photography devotees have developed a language of *ex voto* in collage that articulates specific narratives. Madonna dell'Rosario displays an *ex voto* which has as its subject an airship accident. There is both a photograph of the aircraft and an image in *laminae*. A second photograph of the devotee is accompanied by an embroidered inscription which describes the event: "Bombarded by the whole Ala anti-aircraft defense, they were hit several times, then fell from a height of 3000m and were miraculously unhurt. Sky of Pola, on the night of 5-6th August 1915. Ettore Satta" (Caggiano et al 160).[16] All of the images and the text are skillfully integrated into a tri-colored field of rippled satin. Offerings often include:

> "newspaper clippings...the symbolic gift of metal plate (*laminae*)...mixed with the most varied objects of the new material language which utilized pre-printed sheets, medals, certificates, and degrees on parchment with a signed card. The most frequent sequence includes the photo of the devotee, a small image, a silver plate, and a typescript...Its pastiche of images, writing, decoration and objects has, as a model, the material language of publicity and of its displays, the show windows" (Caggiano et al 77).

The *ex voto* have become frank reflections of contemporary culture chronicling experience with a vocabulary that parallels the structures of both visual art, literature, and popular culture.

The use of photography, painting, and collage as a format for presentation of the *laminae* objects directly corresponds to presentations of much contemporary visual art. The collections of mechanically reproduced objects mounted as masses of texture and testimony relate strongly to the concerns of installation, offering some of the same opportunities for the creation of a conceptually charged environment through the visual organization of materials.

Still, the *ex voto* is primarily "a communication" (Caggiano) "a collection of symbol models, which may be utilized as vehicles and channels with which to communicate with the sacred" (Caggiano et al 95).[17] One aspect of the nature of these communications is addressed by Pietro Caggiano in a church publication from Madonna dell'Rosario. He warns that "During the era of 'social communication' one must avoid the potential dangers of the 'depletion of the sign' (The miracle is ... an objective sign, that is rooted in the 'fact', not merely tied to the judgment of those who have the power to accept or reject it" (Caggiano et al 23).[18] This statement, referring to the authenticity of the sign gains aesthetic currency when read in relation to the literary structures outlined by Roland Barthes, in his essay "Myth Today". Barthes assumes a commonality of experience that lends conviction to intentionally contextualized communications. Speaking of signifier and sign, he describes the signifier, a bunch of roses, as "empty" without the signified, in his example, "passion". It (the roses) becomes a "full" sign through the author's intention and the references and associations provided by society's conventions and traditions (113). The evolving *ex voto* tradition of the last twenty years provides innumerable illustrations of a similar use of object/language. For example, a relatively simple juxtaposition of three *laminae* body signs and a printed image of the Madonna dell'Rosario indicates a complex and poignant narrative without the use of written language.

Walter Benjamin, in his essay "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" states:

> "Artistic production begins with ceremonial objects destined to serve in a cult. [And that] "Originally the contextual integration of art in tradition found its expression in the cult. We know that the earliest art works originated in the service of ritual...first the magical, then the religious kind. It is significant that the existence of the work of art with reference to its aura is never entirely separated from its ritual function. In other words, the unique value of the 'authentic' work of art has its basis in ritual" (219 – 253).

The actual ritual objects of *ex voto* can be examined in relation to this concept of the "authentic". As ancient models of devotion have declined, new models have been synthesized with aura intact and authenticity redescribed. The sanctuary at Pompeii was particularly affected by increased contact with new systems of information and their forms. Designed from the beginning to be open to contemporary changes, it lacked elaborate codes of prohibitions, and was receptive to new varieties of devout expression. Benjamin contends that "that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art..." and that reproductions

Laminae ex voto in painting of automobile accident.

LEFT, TOP
Satin tri-color flag with three photographs, airship in silver lamina and embroidered writing,
Madonna dell'Rosario, Pompeii.
65.5 cm. x 48.5 cm.

LEFT, BOTTOM
Laminae ex voto with x-ray,
Madonna dell'Rosario, Pompeii.

substitute "a plurality of copies for a unique existence." However, the evidence of contemporary devotional objects points instead to an embrace of mechanical reproduction for ritualistic purposes, preserving their authenticity and aura through "the growth of the devotee's personal labor" and newly interpretive discrimination in their presentation and composition. The contemporary *ex voto* provides "proof of the search for an individual and irrepeatable contact" often characterized by the "use and occasional re-elaboration of commercial materials" (223).[19]

While the use of sign and symbol in the *ex voto* tradition is intended to provide instant, transparent legibility, its close links to the prevailing culture lead inevitably to tension between ritual formulas and "the pulling deviation of ever new devotees who transfer to the inside of the sanctuary forms and models from the periphery of civil life" (Caggiano et al 96).[20] Over time the conflict between church and community mounts until traditional forms are visibly altered, rendering those that came before illegible. "Hence, the repeated restructuring of many sanctuary interiors and the concealment of entire sections of *ex voto*, such as wedding gowns, orthopedic apparatus, coffins, cut hair" (Caggiano et al 96) and the use of a new "combination of the irregular and the incoherent in the objects of Artificial Nature" (Caggiano et al 80). The ambiguous messages that result from breaking the rules of a code and that characterize this combining process suggest another shared structure with poetry and visual art. Art can be described as "a way of connecting 'messages' together, in order to produce 'texts' in which the 'rule breaking' roles of ambiguity and self reference are fostered and organized." As Umberto Eco sees it:

> a. many messages on different levels are ambiguously organized.
> b. the ambiguities follow a precise design
> c. both the normal and ambiguous devices in any one message exert a contextual pressure on the normal and ambiguous devices in all the others
> d. the way in which the 'rules' of one system are violated by one message is the same as that in which the rules of another system are violated by their messages"[21](271).

> "The effect is to generate an 'aesthetic idiolect', a 'special language' peculiar to the work of art, which induces in its audience a sense of 'cosmicity'...that is, of endlessly moving beyond each established level of meaning the moment it is established...of continuously transforming 'its denotations into new connotations' "[22] (Hawkes 141).

This description is an excellent gloss on the conceptual and visual idiosyncrasies of recent *ex voto*, and a marked contrast to the intentional clarity of earlier models. In this context, the individual messages of the *laminae ex voto* are sublimated to the devotee's personal sense of overall narrative and visual composition. Use of the silver sheets alone has declined over the last fifty years. However, within the new organizations of materials they retain their meaning as specific signs. They also serve as references to history, industrial society, tradition, and ritual; becoming a vital element in a complex, layered vocabulary of faith that reflects the structures and experience of contemporary culture.

Kate Wagle is a metalsmith and a professor of art at the University of Oregon, Eugene.

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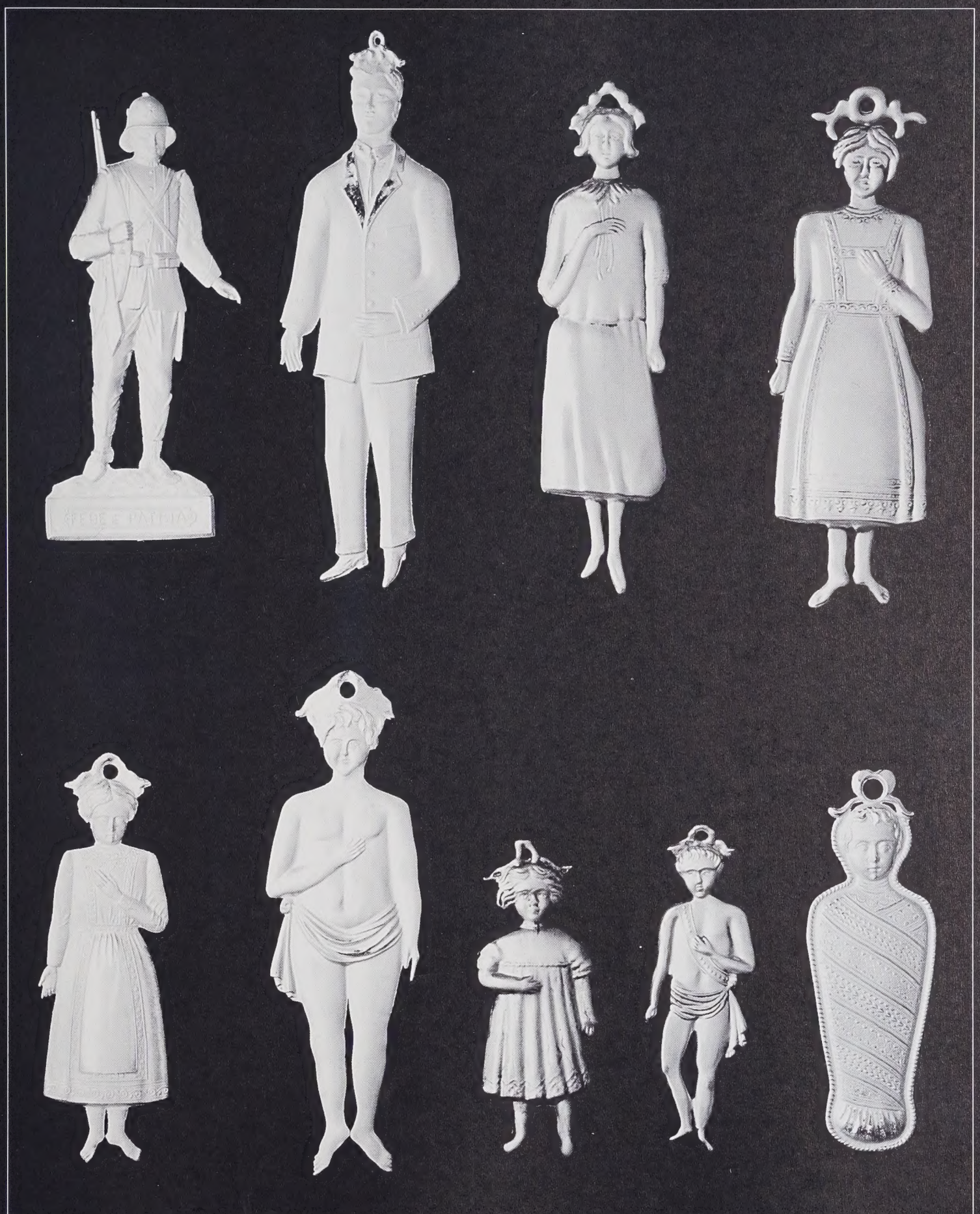


Laminae ex voto, Madonna dell'Rosario, Pompeii.

Philosopher Jeweler

Arizona Metalsmith Kim Rawdin

Text by Ellen Berkovitch

In a poem of the T'ang dynasty, the cultivated man who eats his meal from a polished bowl gazes into the delights that his wealth has bought, and knows his temporality in the majestic universe.

> *In my gold cup clear wine worth ten thousand coins a measure,*
> *In my jade bowl delicious dainties costing ten thousand cash,*
> *Yet I dash down the cup and throw down the chopsticks,*
> *....For my heart dreams of other things....*
> *To ride the wind and break the waves will some day be my lot*
> *And I shall hang out a sail of cloud to bridge the deep sea.*
> *(Li Po)*

Bracelet, 1997
tumbled sterling, 14k bezel,
mabé pearl, coral inlays,
petrified palm wood

Similar explorations of material and time are integral to the jewelry of Arizona metalsmith Kim Rawdin. Richly emotional, expressionistic, a sculpted totality whose wearer exercises the act of completion, Rawdin's work is loyal to his formalist art training even as it articulates an exact aesthetic of its own.

A modernist art education and the raw physicality of the Arizona landscape are married into a distinct vocabulary by Rawdin. The success of his jewelry rests, ultimately, in the body, the human being for whom the jewelry, whether bracelet, necklace, or ring, reveals itself over time. Each object contains through its process of construction a resolution of pattern, movement, and thought. The latter aspect is achieved through Rawdin's incorporation of poetry into the pieces, stamping onto the inside of a bracelet a poetic evocation of a moon crossing a mountain, or wind blowing in the Sonoran desert; in short, a conjuring of the body sensing nature.

Rawdin's jewelry attempts a unification in four dimensions: the surface plane of the metal, the relief fields of colored gemstones, the topography of abstract shapes (rendered in metal), and written poetry. Active in his process is an examination of the theories of Dutch painter Piet Mondrian, especially as they express reduction in the form, in deference to the energetic interplay between planes of color and line. Never academically trained as a jeweler, Rawdin adheres to Mondrian's assertion that "in plastic art reality can be expressed only through the equilibrium of dynamic movements of form and color." His works rely on symphonic arrangements of colored gemstones or three-dimensional metal forms that jut out from the curvature of bracelets or rings.

As a teenager living in the suburbs of New York City, Rawdin visited art museums; he was enamored of Mark Rothko and other color field painters who composed bands of color into harmonious, expansive wholes. When Rawdin came to study modern art, in New York in 1970-72, he discovered the legacy of the New York School of abstract expressionism writ large. Ironically, this was also a period when even as the action painters' contributions to modern art were being assessed, their legatees were leaving town.

It was in the 1960s and 1970s that artists such as Donald Judd, Robert Smithson, and Michael Heizer left the city and migrated west, inscribing their monumental gestures onto the earth itself. The vivid assertions of place that their work decried helped to re-vivify the continent of the Americas for a watching global art market. The earth artists, as they came to be called, redirected aesthetic and cultural attention from the urban museum and gallery into the realm of the vast open tracts of the western United States.

These times and modes of thought played a role in shaping Rawdin's evolution as a jeweler. If a modernist education supported one side of the equation by which he has crafted an individualist vocabulary in jewelry, going to Arizona State University in 1972 completed the structure.

Rawdin's leitmotif is an intuitive interpretation of the raw, physical landscape, especially Arizona land forms with their extreme and arresting topographies. Arizona, like much of the southwest, is a collided and encrusted geology in which the evolutionary strata are revealed in a ready tableau of ridges, buttes, mesas, and shallow valley and desert floors. These features offer a view of geologic nature. At the same time they seem to possess oracular and mystic properties.

In the United States the west could not be a more powerful symbol of the interplay between manufactured artifact and nature. Rawdin's mother grew up in rural East Texas, the child of subsistence level homesteaders. After World War II many of the families from that region relocated to cities, where factory jobs were found. As a child Rawdin often returned with his mother to visit her childhood home. The area had grown over into pine forest, leaving little trace of previous human occupancy.

Rawdin's return to the west can be related, perhaps, to a personal resettlement whereby the untamed and the cultivated join dynamically in the art form of jewelry. Rawdin's work can be explained as re-animating the land form for the body. He remembers 1982 as the year "he finally put it all together," rendering out of his subconscious the biomorphic cloud-like shapes that he calls "forms" and that rise out of the jewelry like a sudden swelling of both earth and idea.

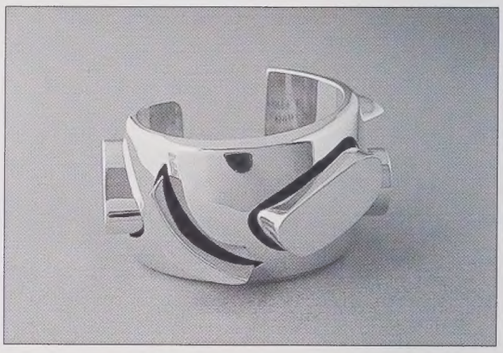
To trace a point of similarity between his stated influences – Chinese thought, Navajo cosmology, and modern art – there is no better place to look than to physical symbols. In Chinese thought geologic formations, such as massive rocks are endowed with spirits. In the poetry of Li Po the movement into refined acts of civilization is expressed in the encounters of man with what has been made from raw matter. The polished bowl functions to remind the man that he is mortal, and will return to earth, at the moment at which he most enjoys life as he tastes delicious food in a fabricated vessel.

In the continent of the Americas, Dine (Navajo) peoples have long constructed and worn jewelry made of gemstones taken from the earth (and in the post-Colombian age they have done the same with coins, which are melted and re-fashioned into jewelry). The jewelry explores a symbolic link beyond simple human decoration. In wearing the jewelry on the body, the wearer cites the body as liaison to the earth. The body wearing the jewelry and the jewelry unite the human with the earth and the universal energy that is the source of life.

It was Jasper Johns who coined the maxim that to make art is to take a material and do something to it. Art from matter is constant for Rawdin, who says "I approach jewelry as a sculptor, working with negative and positive space and volume." The arching planes of Rawdin's jewelry are carriers of the tension by which the artisan expresses and refines his communication of nature and form. The contained field of a bracelet alludes to a landscape; yet, it also resurrects the moment of exacting attention that results from examining the very small. A diverse array of gemstones coalesces into a field, or an abstract metal shape evokes three-dimensional physical territory.

Even as Rawdin plans the palette and shapes for a given piece, he must restrain the gestures to those that are elemental for that object. The end he seeks is to unite the disparate elements of a piece of jewelry into a contained design reflecting purity of form.

"Pure means" was the phrase coined by Mondrian to define the most effective way of attaining equilibrium in a picture plane. Mondrian the theorist of the *DeStijl* movement was also its most ardent practitioner. His paintings are energetic geometries composed of rectangular sections of grids of black line and primary colors.



Top
Bracelet
18k

Above
Bracelet
18k

Pendant
sterling, mabé pearl,
coral inlay, petrified palm

As a teenager Rawdin painted non-objective forms and color bars on raw muslin. But it wasn't until his middle twenties, when he walked into a hogan on the Navajo reservation where he had been hired to teach silversmithing to Navajo high school students, that he encountered the language by which he could realize ambitious aesthetic goals. (At that time he possessed no prior education as a jeweler, only books and a natural skill for metalwork.)

Before arriving in Chinle in 1976, Rawdin recalls, he was contemptuous of metalwork and jewelry crafts, viewing them as part of an elitist tradition that fed American consumer trends. But once there, his experiences altered his prejudice. Impressed by the sight of Navajo elders wearing their jewelry during ceremonies, he developed an understanding of how the forms of jewelry related to the land. The forms in jewelry which imitated landscape forms, and human bodies wearing these volumes, were seminal in his development.

An iconic and experiential quality is found in the high arches and exalted geometries of surface of Rawdin's bracelets and rings. The constructed areas consist of jutting gemstones (sometimes married with wood and plastic) or abstract metal forms that he sculpts in an intuitive re-imagining of geography. The surface can be read as a kind of visual map experienced from above, almost like an aerial survey.

For the wearer a movement of wrist and hand animates the sculpted whole. She *completes* the piece, just as a viewer experiencing a painting kinesthetically acts to finish it, paralleling the way that the southwestern landscape mutates and reveals itself through time and experience.

According to Rawdin the popularity of silver jewelry across the United States was an inestimable benefit to the Navajos. Arts programs on reservations were heavily funded. By 1976, the year Rawdin began teaching, the high school at which he was employed had six art teachers, and a hogan had been constructed for silversmithing. Navajo silversmith Gene Jackson was a full time artist-in-residence.

Largely self-taught, Rawdin nevertheless benefited from the proliferating innovations of "New Indian Jewelry." The phrase, coined by Preston Monongye in a 1972 issue of *Arizona Highways,* referenced works which combined traditional techniques with a highly individualist and diverse vocabulary. Silversmiths such as Gail Bird and Yazzie Johnson (still making jewelry in New Mexico), Monongye, Kenneth Begay, and Charles Loloma were trendsetters in this arena.

Loloma, a Hopi who had studied at Alfred University and worked for years as a ceramist and teaching pottery at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, was among the first to apply an elaborate mixed materials inlay to traditional forms of Hopi silversmithing. Using components such as wood and ivory and abutting them into spacious tracts, Loloma constructed a tactile and dynamic plane on both the inside and the outside of his pieces. The public face and the private interior of the jewelry were in constant interplay.

Spaciousness inside a confined surface became in jewelry, as it had in modernist painting, an important visual and physical fact. One can trace a relationship between small size and expanded scale in some of the best work made in the west by this century's modernist painters. Look, for example, to the lovely Palo Duro canyon watercolors made by Georgia O'Keeffe in the 1910s, and small works from this period by Arthur Dove and Marsden Hartley.

In jewelry, Navajo craftsmen Victor Beck and Kenneth Begay were especially successful at achieving modern space in design. The concept of forms animated by mobility, yet demonstrating allegiance to traditional methods of construction, marked a turning point in Rawdin's evolution. He now believes that both Loloma and he extended learned techniques in a similar fashion: "blowing out the shapes;" applying to the forms a probing exploration of surface to incorporate negative space; protrusions; and broad yet compact spans of inlay upon the jewelry.

From Gene Jackson, who had studied with Kenneth Begay, Rawdin learned the dome or shadow box form, which he still uses for making hollowed spaces in the bracelets. The procedure is to hollow out the top of the form, solder it to a flat bottom plate and create, using the negative space thus achieved, new volumes in the jewelry, whether embodied in a color field or in relief forms of sculpted metal or inlay.

This sense of inner and outer space co-existing approximates a physical layering in paint, whereby forms emerge out of what Rawdin calls "mysterious dark places."

The "mysterious dark places" of Rawdin's work coalesced, physically, with his encounters with the canyons of The Four Corners area and explorations of Anasazi ruins. In the jewelry these sites can be viewed as self-referential, illuminating through matter a quest similar to the efforts of the T'ang scholars to marry the sensory apprehension of culture and nature.

Rawdin's preferred bracelet form keeps to a particular high curvature. Their heft and delicacy is balanced in a proportional symmetry. "I particularly like the bracelet because I can explore the form to its fullest extent: the sculpture, the color and the poetry," he says.

So far all the bracelets have been fabricated out of sheet. He has rarely cast any forms, although he is beginning to incorporate cast shapes into the jewelry. The finishes he has applied have alternated between three types: a high shine, a matte finish, and a tumbled finish. More recently, he has begun masking certain areas of a piece to combine finishes to achieve a more elaborate surface treatment.

Rawdin describes his design process as sculptural and intuitive. He does not draw a design on paper, rather he "evolves" it as he goes, relying on instinct for the gestures of subtraction and addition (principally, addition) that produce the final design.

Rawdin arranges the stones both by color and to define transitions between colors in the stones and the piece as a whole. He also pays attention to the energy fields of each stone, citing as favorites: apple green chrysoprase and the semi-precious hard stones of coral, jade, lapis, and turquoise.

Recently, borrowing from postmodern art practice, Rawdin has started appropriating materials from the modernist decades: in particular old Bakelite jewelry, de-constructing and re-configuring art deco pieces that he has found.

The poetry marks an aesthetic end for every piece. The "final note in the symphony" of creating a finished design is the writing of a poem that expresses the temporal aspects of the piece. The poem stamped on the inside of the bracelet is often not noticed by the wearer until she gets it home, a fact that allows Rawdin to imagine a personal connection between the site of conception and the personal site of the wearer.

Poetry, for Rawdin, "reduces the thought (of the jewelry) to a pure form." As he considers the topography of the bracelets as they coexist with the topography of the Four Corners area, he recalls the precepts of Taoist and Zen thought, internal referents which "purify my forms."

Left to right

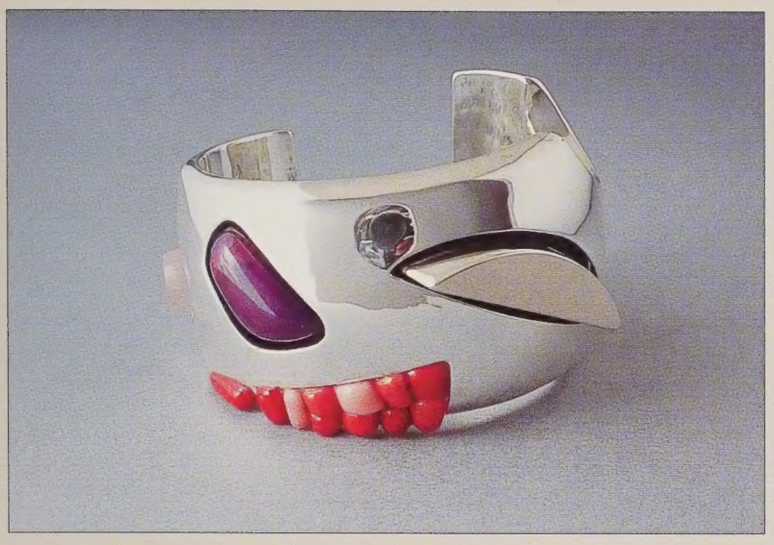
Bracelet
sterling, onyx ring, jade

Bracelet, c. 1988
sterling, turquoise, coral inlay

Bracelet
sterling, 14k, coral, sugalite, pink chalcedonys

Shadowbox Bracelets, 1997
sterling, corals, chalcedonys, lapis, opal, onyx, turquoise

Shadowbox Ring, 1997
sterling, 18k, 14k, chrysoprase, facet peridot



"I write the poems in a sketchbook where I sketch the bracelet, and when it's time to do the poem, I often write the poem then, if I can, with inspiration. Or if I have written poems at other times then I'll look through my notebook and try to connect the intuitiveness of my handwork with the intuition of the poetic thought."

The "energy" that Rawdin cites as a gestational force behind the jewelry exists not only in the manipulation of material but in the practice of making a vision realizable in language. "When you read an ancient Chinese poem, it's immediate and real. The energy you receive is another birth, never mind that it's a thousand years later. I see that as being part of my bracelet, that the thought can keep going and living, and the bracelet is a house for it, a time capsule."

The silver (or gold) impressed by the stamp bespeaks an eloquent statement about duration in time. There is the time it takes to read the poem; the time it took to compose the bracelet; and the time, in perpetuity, of the physical world from which all form emerges.

In Rawdin's jewelry, the complex gesture and the complex thought meet the day in the body of the wearer:

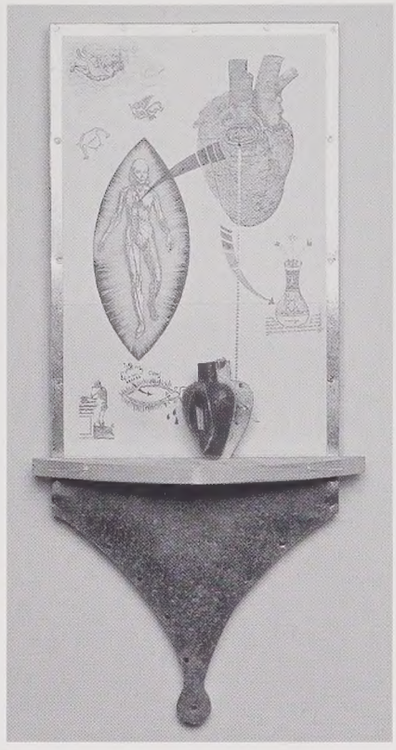
in stillness
I hear the world....

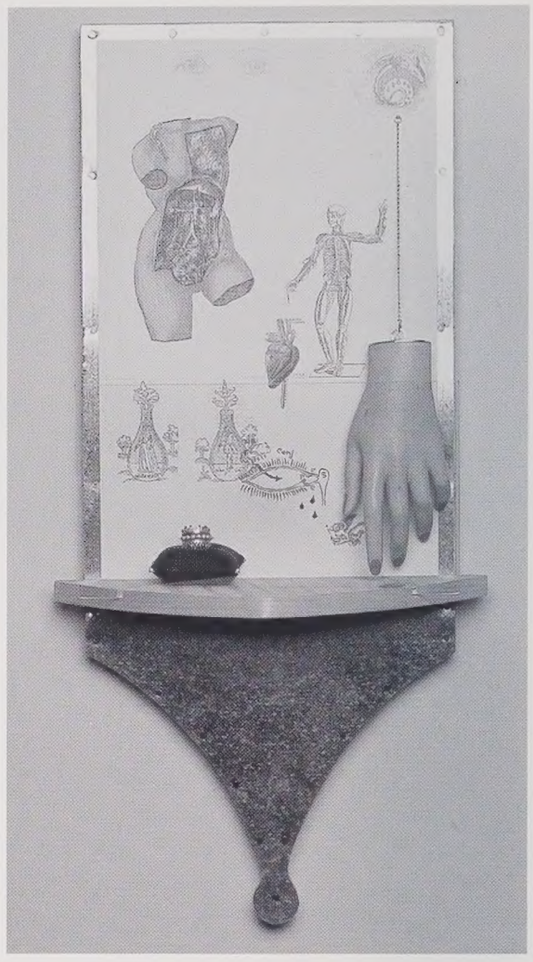
Smaller than a tiny stone
the universe delivers itself...

The deep situation
of unsung beauty
and the Sonoran dusk...

This statement of perception aims for unity, for the understanding of the wearer to whom it is communicated. The expression in jewelry aims for a unity of material, of form, of color. The qualities of a process that borrows so liberally from diverse cultural traditions is a strength of Rawdin's jewelry. For the wearer it provides a relationship that is personal and closely designed: a distillation of one man's relationship to the earth and to the centuries of thought that has preceded him.

Ellen Berkovitch is an art critic, freelance writer, and poet who resides in Santa Fe, New Mexico.





ABOVE
A Love Story: My Sacred Heart, 1995–96
wood, galvanized steel, lead, gems, silver, gold, 30 x 14 x 7"

Artists on Art
Polly DuBois

El Paso Museum of Art
El Paso, Texas
February 1997

By Joshua Cooley

The space for the Artist of the Month shows at the El Paso Museum of Art is a bit curious; not quite a gallery, not quite a passageway, it is a small, ambiguous area between spaces of more specific functions. As such it was an excellent space for Polly DuBois to show her work, since she too works in the discursive spaces between our expectations of media, form, and content.

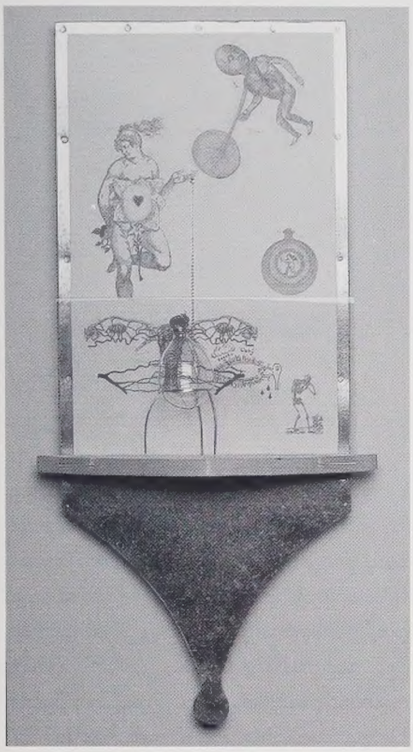
Arranged on several stands were small sculptural objects, the oldest pieces in the show. *Circular Ruse*, 1995, is a small cone of lead, sealed at the large end with a glass dome, containing powdered pigment of rich red. *Circular Ruse, Pretense, Promise*, 1995, is a larger cone of galvanized sheet metal, with a similar glass dome containing ochre-colored earth and detritus from machines and manufacturing: small bits of slag, gears, and springs from a clock. Turning these pieces shifted the material contained within, revealing and hiding the contents, changing the detail, and adding to the effectiveness of the works. In the talk she gave on her works, DuBois related them to recurring dreams, and linked both the dreams and the objects to the personal experience of a sometimes impersonal, technology-oriented world.

The experience of finding oneself in a situation which seems overdetermined by culture is also explored in *Love Story*, 1995-96, a mixed-media wall installation in four parts. Each of the parts includes a display consisting of a sheet-metal and plywood support, a small wooden shelf, and a protective sheet of glass attached to the shelf and parallel to the wall; each unit holds one or more pieces of jewelry. The metal of the support above the shelves is gessoed and printed with illustrations taken from old medical and/or alchemical texts. These images of anatomy and mystical union reflect the Western construction of women as the observed or utilized Other, without an identity separate from that of the observing or creating male.

The jewelry, however, questions this voiceless construction of women, using the traditions of religion and mysticism in a new way, reconstructing woman in the image of the artist's self. *St. Lucy's Eyes See*, the first in the series, contains a silver and painted glass brooch resembling a stem and leaves and/or two eyes. Tradition tells the story of St. Lucy, who made a gift of her eyes to an admirer rather than be a source of temptation for him. Because of her selfless self-mutilation, Lucy was sainted, and her eyes were returned. DuBois's piece questions the implications of this myth: are the eyes mere decoration, precious jewels for the lover's admiration, or do they assume a permanence on their own, an eternal gaze outward from themselves, objectifying their observers?

My Sacred Heart, the second in the series, is a large pendant of painted and gilded wood, with bone, glass, and gems. The locket is a sort of reliquary, precious in its own right, and containing bits of material that command attention. The Sacred Heart of Mary, venerated in Roman Catholic practice, is transformed into a concrete object, capable of being worn and displayed or hidden; it is reconstituted by the artist as something which can be controlled by its owner. *Hysteria,* the third in the series, is related to *My Sacred Heart* in transforming an overconceptualized part of the female body back into an object, in this case a small glass alembic, which in its form recalls the uterine imagery used in the alchemical texts describing the use of alembics and other arcane equipment. Here again DuBois is simultaneously both examining the historical construction of women and reclaiming the original matter of that construction for her own use.

LEFT
A Love Story: Conjunctio, Separatio, or Putrifactio?, 1995–96
wood, galvanized steel, glass, gold, lead, (hand), 30 x 14 x 7"



A Love Story: Hysteria, 1995–96
wood, galvanized steel, glass, silver, gold, gems, 30 x 14 x 7"

Centennial Metals Exhibition: Jewelry, Hollowware and Ironwork

Society of Arts and Crafts
Boston, Massachusetts
May 3 – June 29, 1997

By Patricia Harris and David Lyons

The final part of the series, *Conjunctio, Separatio,* or *Putrefactio?* contains two pieces of jewelry; a wedding ring and a pendant shaped like a hand. The ring is of lead, gold, seed pearls, and garnets, reminding this viewer of the goal of much alchemical investigation (transforming lead into gold) by juxtaposing the precious and the base (lead, after all, is poison). The pendant is a mannequin's hand, strung on a chain, tying the idea of a hand given in marriage to the eyes of St. Lucy. By presenting marriage-related objects in this way, DuBois reveals the rather one-sided understanding of marriage still prevalent in Western society, in which the female is given to the male, much like a piece of jewelry.

Taken together, the pieces in the show confound expectations of what is proper within the categories of object-making, with sculptural objects which demand handling, and jewelry which can't really be worn. They also blur the lines between subject and object; the condition of women is both observed as a historical construction, and examined from within by a woman living in a Western culture. Through her work DuBois both narrates the objective expectations of women and the subjective experience of trying to understand these expectations in order to escape them. It is an ambitious goal, and one which DuBois meets well, both through both form and content.

Joshua Cooley is an Art History graduate student at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces, New Mexico

The most remarkable thing about the centennial metals exhibition at Boston's Society of Arts and Crafts is that much of the work remains true to the spirit and design aesthetics that the SAC was founded to champion back in 1897. That's not to suggest that the show of ninety pieces by forty-five makers is derivative. Michael Monroe, executive director of the American Craft Council and former curator of the Smithsonian's Renwick Gallery, curated the SAC exhibition with an inclusive eye, seeking to provide a survey of contemporary work in metal. His choices suggest that the push-pull between biomorphic form and form derived from the Platonic beauty of geometry continues as an aesthetic dialogue, even a century after the arts and crafts movement's first toehold in America.

One group of conservative pieces might have been equally at home in a turn-of-the-last-century showcase. Richard Mawdsley's tea infuser, for example, is almost reactionary in his revival of the Renaissance footed cup as a medium for the expression of artistic and technical virtuosity. Simplicity of design makes Gary Noffke's 969-silver spoons timeless. Even June Schwarcz's untitled electroformed copper vessel with enameled wires recalls the veined glass vessels of the early years of American Arts and Crafts. Thomas Muir's silver *Orchid Vase* almost perfectly echoes that earlier period's preoccupation with voluptuous floral form. *(Continued next page)*

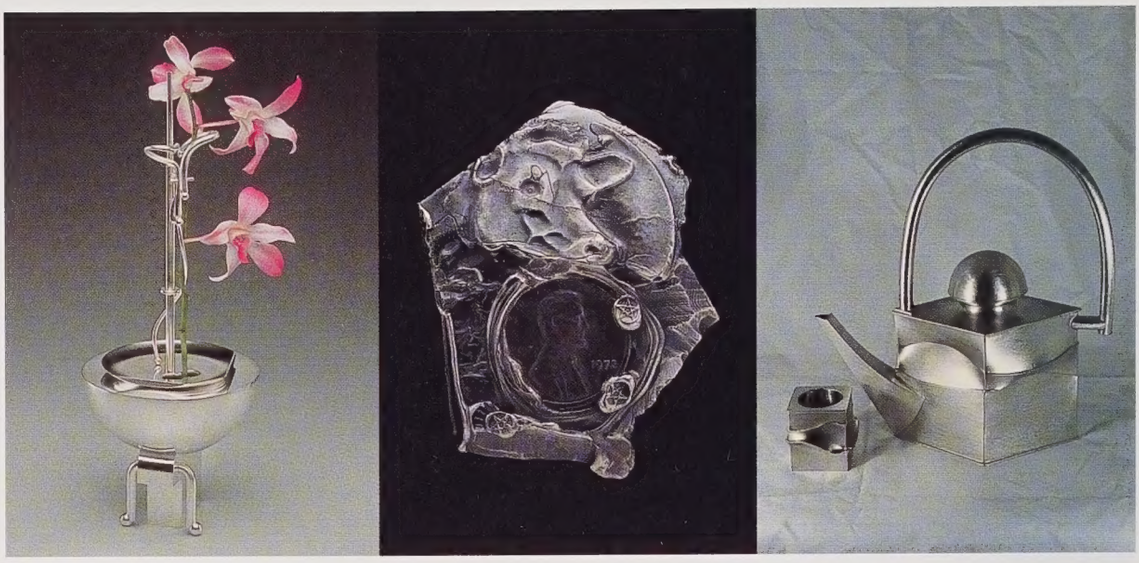
ABOVE
Gary Noffke
Spoon Group, 1993–1996
forged 969 silver, 5 –18" length

LEFT TO RIGHT

Thomas P. Muir
Orchid Vase, 1995
sterling
11½ x 4¾"

J. Fred Woell
Midwest Icons, 1996
sterling, penny
2¼ x 1⅝ x ¼"

Fred Fenster
Teapot and Cup
pewter, 11" high



Other pieces show how Arts and Crafts design principles have been transformed by subsequent artistic movements. Helen Shirk's *Sustaining Spirit II,* a copper vase-like vessel, enlivens the trumpet bloom shape with a vividly expressionist color palette. Similarly, the drawn-out bowl shapes and chunky spouts and handles of Randy Stromsöe's *Pot à Crème et Cafetière* pay homage both to medieval-inspired tea services and to the industrial shapes of post-Brancusi sculpture.

Perhaps because much of the exhibition is devoted to jewelry and other ornamentation, few objects explore the inherent qualities of metal, though there are exceptions. A Fred Fenster pewter teapot and cup appear at first glance simply to recapitulate the form-versus-function debate in favor of function. But a closer look reveals that, functional though they may be, both pot and cup derive their aesthetic interest by calling attention to how the pewter responds to bending and folding. In a similar vein, Charles Crowley's *Rocking Chair* calls attention to the material from which it is made rather than the function of the piece; the spare design (which a Boston critic likened to the chairs Isamu Noguchi designed for Martha Graham's Appalachian Spring) is executed in aluminum, hardly a comfort material.

Monroe has not slighted the sculptural strain of contemporary metalwork. Susan Ewing's *Inner Circle Teapot* straddles the divide between functional and sculptural with surprising grace, at once exploiting the harmonies of geometry and flaunting its inventive engineering. By contrast, Billie Jean Theide's *Butte #EF-4,* also a copper teapot, evokes geological forms and coloration, yet remains strongly identifiable as an artifact. Tom Joyce's inlaid pieced iron bowl has similar origins in geography — it was inspired by farmlands viewed from the air. Yet Joyce has embedded the object with metaphor. The contrast between the burnished patchwork surface and a hole in the middle that leads to the support structure is intended to suggest a link between the mundane and the dark underworld lurking just below that surface.

The occasional juxtaposition of historic Arts and Crafts pieces with contemporary work is almost a study in the evolution of consciousness. The samples from early in the 20th century demonstrate a preoccupation with elegance of form, technical virtuosity, and attention to tradition. The contemporary pieces add a late 20th century preoccupation with intellectual awareness.

Therein lies the challenge that most works in this show meet so well: to make it new. Several Fred Woell pieces in the exhibition almost serve as a metaphor for the task of building on the past by providing new context. Woell was a pioneer in incorporating found objects into jewelry. But straight appropriation of the past carries the danger of mere sentimentality, while the simple juxtaposition of the past with the present runs the risk of being little more than a trivial wisecrack. (Mona Lisa with a moustache was funny when Duchamp did it, but it got old very quickly.) Woell navigates between Scylla and Charybdis by providing wit to accompany surprise. His *Midwest Icons,* for example, includes not only the Lincoln penny but a smiling milk cow. And it depends solidly on the title to make its meaning manifest.

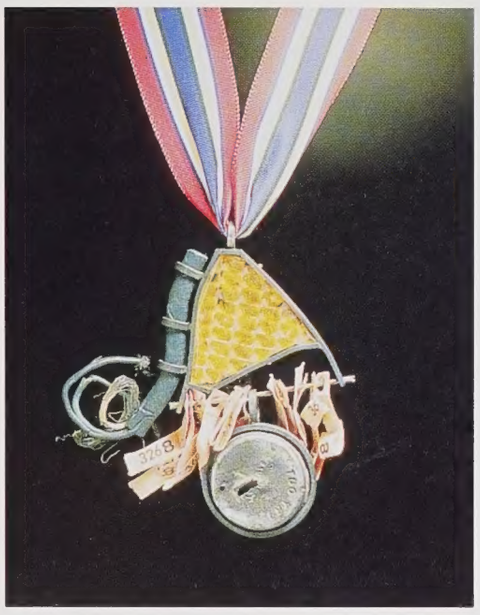
The narrative humanoid pins of Bruce Metcalf round out the exhibition as works most evolved toward a self-conscious cerebrality. *A Candle in the City of Darkness* – a pin and display set combination – offers one of Metcalf's cartoon-like grotesques holding a candle aloft. The display set, a classical Greek motif, suggests Diogenes in search of the proverbial honest man; the title proposes the nameless figure who would light a candle rather than curse the darkness. It depends entirely on context for its content. Stripped of title or display setting, the pin becomes simply ornamental. As a result, Metcalf's message addresses a less-than-obvious issue of wearability. Is a work without explanation the entire work, or must its story accompany it?

As the most extreme example in this exhibition, Metcalf's work raises an interesting question: In the century since the Arts and Crafts movement began in America, has the desire to recapture the human touch in the making of objects found its parallel in a need to make human discourse an essential component of the work as well?

Patricia Harris and David Lyons are writers who live in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

RIGHT
Used Car Salesman, series, 1992
copper, auto reflector, found objects

FAR RIGHT
Elvis's Demise, 1993
copper, Elvis memorabilia



James MaloneBeach

Northwood Gallery
Midland, Michigan
January 2 – 31, 1997

By David Stairs

Of the many forms of ritual body adornment in the world, objects awarded for service to one's community, have a particularly illustrious history. In fact, much of history can be construed from the existence of these artifacts. Since ancient times societies have commemorated kings and warriors with testimonials of worth. More recently, awards rooted in military and heraldic symbolism have been the goal of peoples both free and oppressed. Goethe conceived a series of medallions to be bestowed for achievement in humanities and *belles lettres.* A century later Alfred Nobel instituted his series of international awards for accomplishment in a variety of fields. But what about the mundane, the quotidian, or the ephemeral? With so much of life lived between the interstices of great events, the absence of awards for achievement in everyday activities seems a glaring oversight. I'm not talking about Employee of the Month notices, which are fine in their place, but bona fide chest medals, shoulder braid, and boondoggle.

James MaloneBeach is what Italian cultural historian Ezio Manzini would call a "Prometheus of the Everyday." For over twenty years the Minnesota-born metalsmith has worked to acknowledge the power and beauty of common events. In a lecture delivered to the 25th Congress of FIDEM (The International Federation for the Promotion of Medallic Art) at Neuchatal Switzerland, MaloneBeach spoke about The Metaphysics of Found Objects, a picturesque description of his working methods. To him gold is not more precious than a beetle's carapace, and the most precious stone a good deal less valuable than a child's crude sketch.

In a January 1997 show at the Northwood Gallery in Midland Michigan MaloneBeach, who teaches at both university and middle school levels, exhibited a dozen of his distinctive medallions. The *Alabama Bug Series*, which utilize the remains of a cicada, a millipede, and a palmetto bug, document a stint living in the south. During this period the artist was employed at an inner city school in Birmingham, which he describes as "a very dangerous place." A second series, *Alabama Education* grew out of this experience. Composed of objects found around the school, ranging from pencils and dice to prophylactics and shell casings, these pieces are a testament to the artist's "frustration and anger with Southern education." One piece, *Educational Reform*, includes grocery receipts, one of the means by which underfunded school administrators tried to close the spending gap.

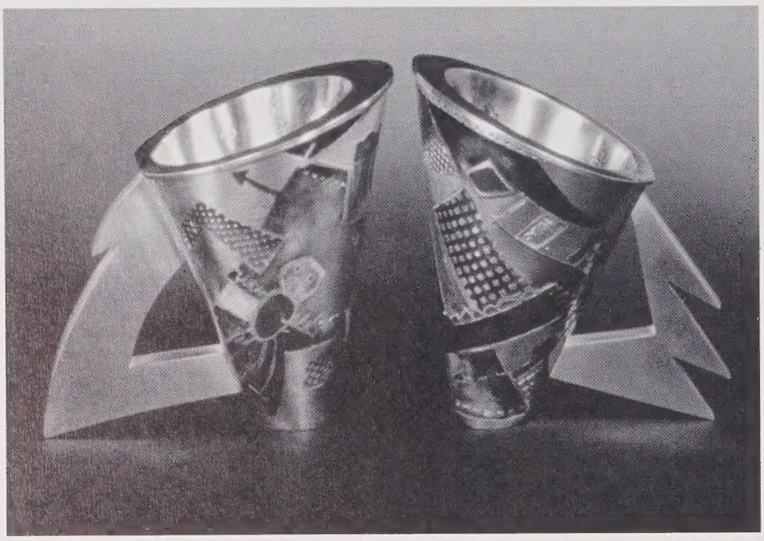
Not all of MaloneBeach's efforts are as stingingly caustic as his critique of a community too stingy to fund its schools. In his *Northern Minnesota Fishing Triptyc*h, MaloneBeach lampoons the isolation of life in a small town of the upper middle west. He has said, "It seemed to me that the only way my art would sell was if it could catch fish," and the work, a combination of hooks, lines, and sinkers, with a fish-house license thrown in for good measure, very likely could. In his *Great Turkey Hunt* MaloneBeach recollects the story of the untimely demise of a bird which attacked his master's companion. Using a map fragment, a turkey beard, and 12-gauge shotgun shell casings MaloneBeach created a piece that was awarded FIDEM's Best Experimental Medal of '96, the first time an American has been so recognized by the federation.

My personal favorite in the show was *A Son's Youth Remembered.* In this memento MaloneBeach incorporated his now adult son's childhood drawing of the Wicked Witch of the West in a medallion commissioned for a children's theater production of the Wizard of Oz. As a sweet reminiscence of *temps perdu*, the work captures the emotional power present in children's art, an important leitmotif for the output of an artist with 25 years experience working with kids.

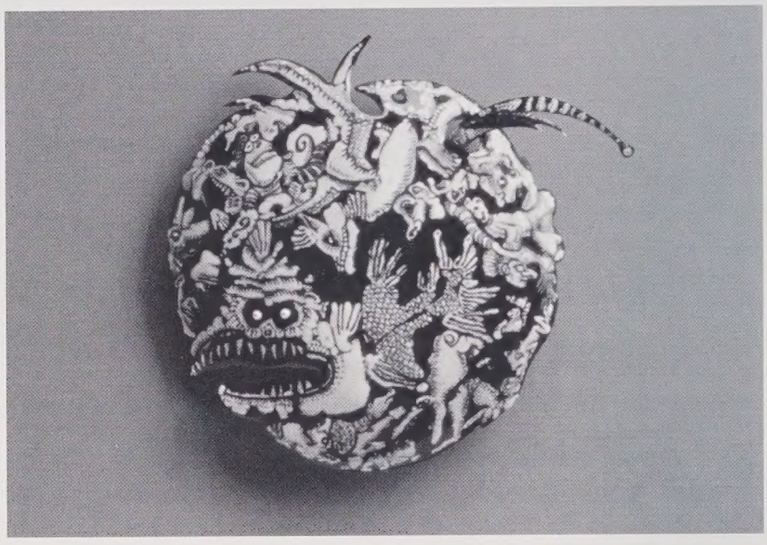
Jim MaloneBeach has proved the adage that art is all around us. Certainly the stuff of art can be found anywhere - at curbside, or in pocket change. But these objects must be put to an appropriate emotional use. The *Medal of Honor* was commissioned by Congress in 1862 to acknowledge acts of great heroism amid the carnage of the Civil War. MaloneBeach believes everyone deserves a medal for the sheer effort to survive the toils of day to day living. "I make medals that celebrate the unique and individual events which define human existence," he says.

John Lennon once sang, "A working-class hero is something to be." Jim MaloneBeach's work consistently supports this perspective. The day society decides to hand out awards for valor in the face of extreme mundanity, those awards will undoubtedly be designed by James MaloneBeach.

David Stairs lectures in graphic design and design history at Central Michigan University.



LEFT
Linda Darty
Fathers and Sons
sterling, enamel
5 x 4 x 4' each



Expressions in Glass on Metal

North America East
Enamels 1997 Juried Exhibition

Torpedo Factory
Baltimore, Maryland

By J. Susan Isaacs

Enamel work can sometimes depend too much on the innate beauty of the material and not enough on design or content, and certainly there was work in the recent National Enamelist Guild's juried exhibition at the Torpedo Factory that fits this category. However, there were also a substantial number of very strong pieces that are of interest to those beyond the inner circle of glass on metal practitioners and enthusiasts, including a great many works that represent some of the best in enamel on metal being done today.

Juried by John Fix, Professor of Art at Towson University, Kenneth R. Trapp, Curator in Charge of the Renwick Gallery of the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, and Jean Tudor, Enamelist and Past-President of the Enamelist Society, the exhibition, like many juried shows, represents an eclectic body of work, in this case including at least seventy-two different artists who work in numerous styles and employ varying techniques. Every major method was represented: cloisonné, grisaille, plique-a-jour, and many more. One of the more interesting things to do when examining a metals show is to attempt to determine how individual pieces are constructed. Since so many different artists and methods are demonstrated in this exhibition it is an especially enjoyable exercise here.

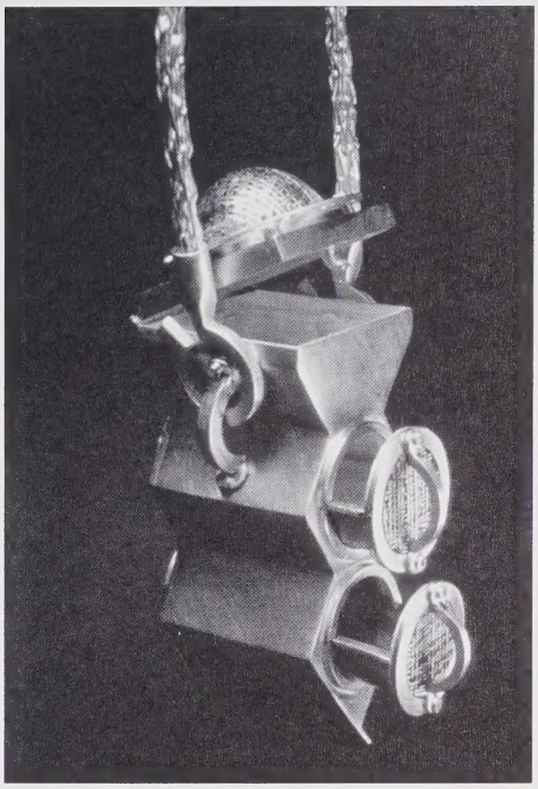
Certainly, one of the most fascinating pieces, and a work that would be equally comfortable in a sculpture exhibition, was Susan M. Garten's *Dreams Have Turned to Dust*, comprised of three boxes of woven copper. It stands out in this exhibition for both its subject and technique. The differently sized rectangular forms demonstrate a rougher approach to the enamel process than that shown by most of the other artists in the exhibition. With rather dull, purposely burned colors of matted greens, whites, grays, reds, blues, and purples covering dented, imperfect boxes, the work makes a sculptural statement that is quite different and inelegant, though engrossing. Purists looking for a traditional approach to enameling may have difficulty understanding this particular piece.

A more traditional and elegant approach to abstract sculptural form can be seen in Cynthia Curio *Poli's Destiny*, a circular form with a red, blue, white, and gold exterior created with copper, sterling silver, brass, glass, fine silver, and 23k gold foil. The piece has both an interior and exterior and stands approximately eight inches tall. Its surface design alludes to the cosmos, the solar system, and the night sky. The basic form is vessel-like with undulating curves.

Steve Alan Musselman's work also demonstrates a sensitivity to the metal form as well as to the enamel. The applied colors are integral to the works and function as a part of the whole. Musselman's pieces are personal reliquaries, grid boxes, and scent boxes. Their forms recall medieval as well as nonwestern art, including African sculpture. Comprised of woven silver screens, his shapes are geometric, precise, and powerful, even in their small scale. His mastery of the plique-a-jour technique is impressive and here it is employed as a part of the design whole, not simply as an exhibition of his considerable technical prowess.

LEFT
Carin Preston
Personal Demons #3
enamel, copper,
foil, silver granulations
14½ x 14½"

Cynthia Corio Poli
Vessel
copper, enamel, sterling, brass,
fine silver, 23k foil, silver foil



Steve Alan Musselman
Scent Box
enamel, sterling, fine silver
2¼ x ¾"

Quite different from Musselman's aesthetically serious approach is the whimsical and fantastical content of Carin Preston's two wall hangings from the series: *Personal Demons*. Images of outlandish characters and animals in a sophisticated cartoon style are executed in black and white enamel on copper with foil and silver granulation. They contrast with much of the rest of the exhibition and demonstrate both a cultivated wit and tremendous technical expertise.

Isabella Corwin's equally funny and charming *Carpe Duo* echoes the humor of Preston's work. Corwin's two fish are created with a very hard stone finish and mounted like two trophies in a small frame decorated with oxidized copper trim.

The gallery is average in size and because this kind of work tends to be small, many pieces fill the walls and cases. Nonetheless, a few pieces stand out. Among those that demand attention, The masklike faces in a tropical setting of Katherine Wood's *Enchanted Forest* recalls the primitive images of Gauguin. The bright colors are outlined with gold plate. This work, along with its companion piece, *Terra Incognita II*, were displayed in black, complex frames lending Wood's flat, somewhat small works, a precious and valued quality.

Two active members of the Guild, Ute Conrad and Dorthea M. Stover exhibited works that exemplify the skills for which each has become known well. Stover's *Birdwatching at Kells*, an irregularly shaped plate whose imagery is based on the famous Celtic manuscript, both borrows from the late 8th century illuminations and joyously takes flight beyond them. Stover's delicate and fluid outlining of forms with silver wire seems beyond the mortal and her second entry, *Angel with Binoculars* extends her witty, biblical references. These two works would excite the scholar of medieval art and culture and Stover draws on her art history experience with great finesse.

Conrad's European background is most readily apparent in her *Surface Study II – Filigree and Flower* whose color, line, and overall design recall Jugendstil, the late-nineteenth century Austrian/German strain of Art Nouveau. Elegant forms depicted in greens, blues, turquoises, and ochres depict undulating plants. Conrad's technique depends upon a photo silk screen applied to the metal to create the design, which is then enameled.

Don Viehman's mastery of the cloisonné technique in a pin entitled *Urban Landscape* demonstrates one of the best examples of this technique in the exhibition with its opalescent and clear colors. Linda Darty's two part *Fathers and Sons* is comprised of two decorated vessels created in sterling silver. Again, in these two containers the emphasis is as much on the metalwork as it is on the surface decoration. This merits attention as it seems a common practice in enameling is to exhibit more concern with the glass than the metal and to purchase and use pre-built metal forms to act as the support rather than to design and construct one-of-a-kind sculptural forms.

This year's juried exhibition is tremendously varied in styles, techniques, and, like most group juried shows, quality. Considering the large number of artists included in the exhibition and the wide range of approaches to enamel art, the overall level of the show is very high. It is a tribute to the ingenuity of the organizers, the skills of the artists, and the taste and eyes of the jurors.

Susan J. Isaacs is an assistant professor of art history at Towson University, Baltimore, Maryland.

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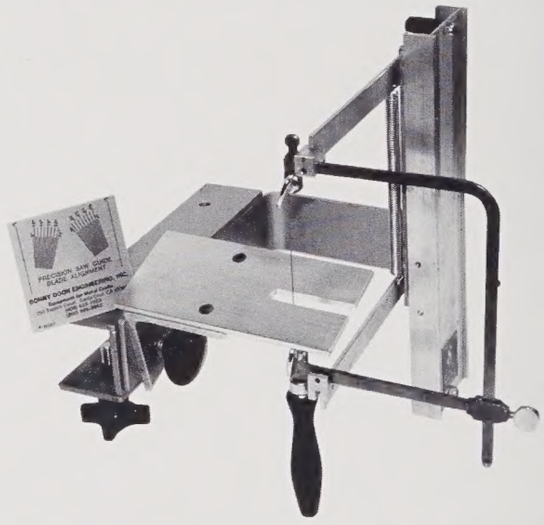

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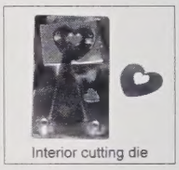

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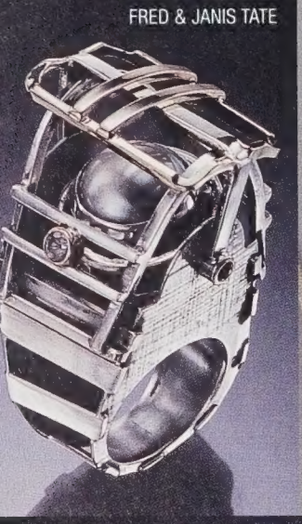
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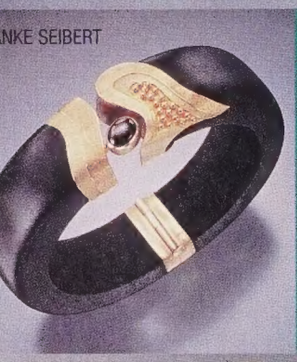
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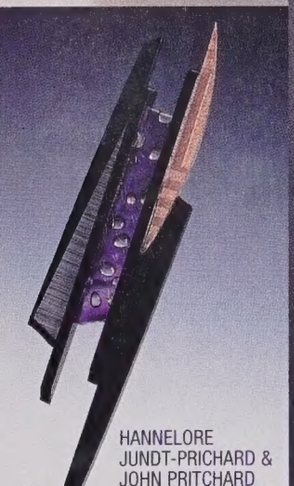
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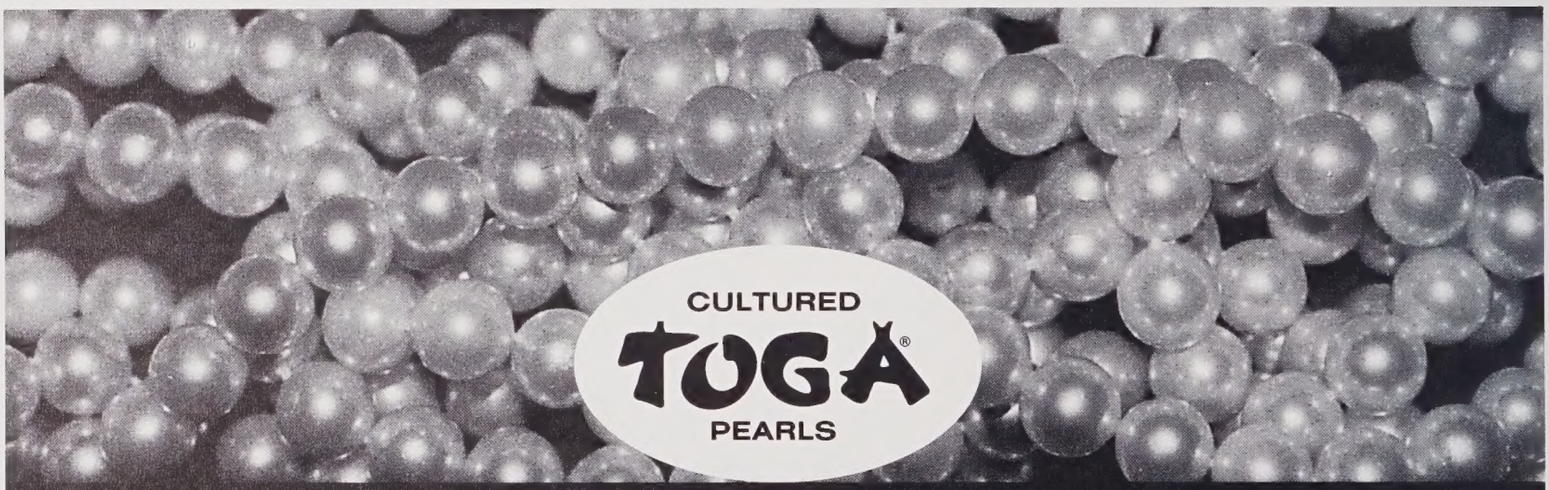

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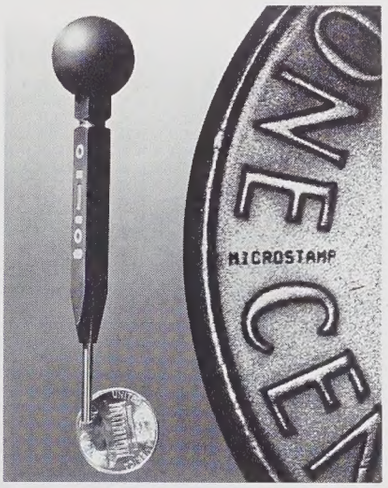

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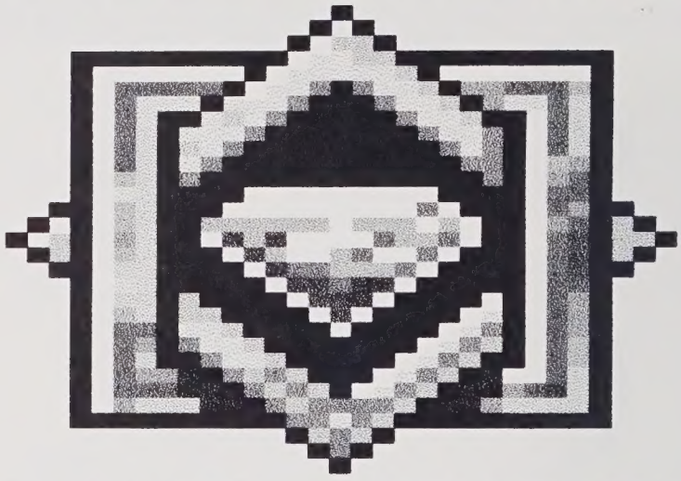

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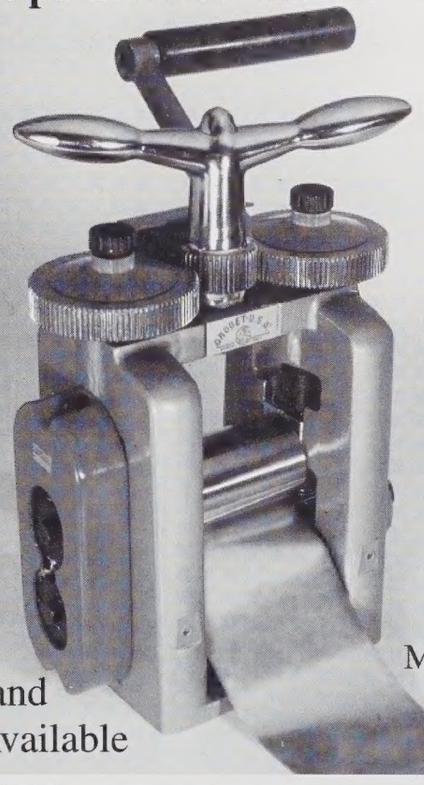

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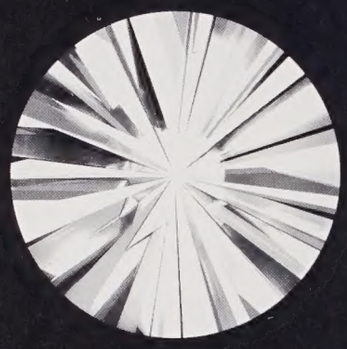

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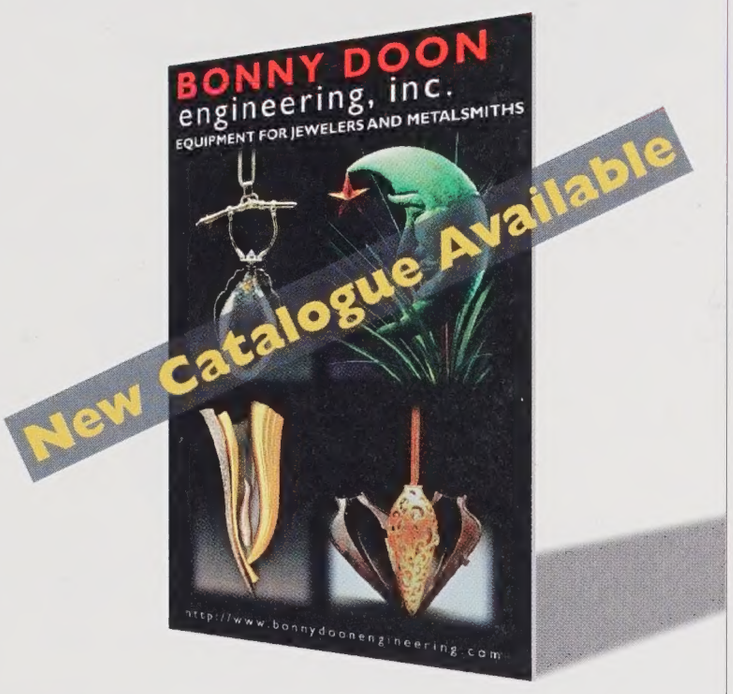

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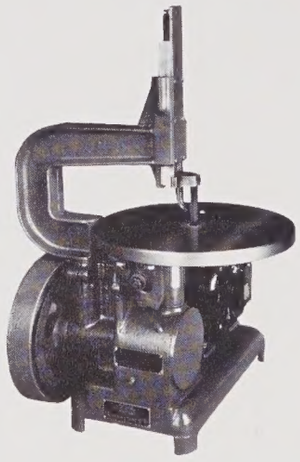

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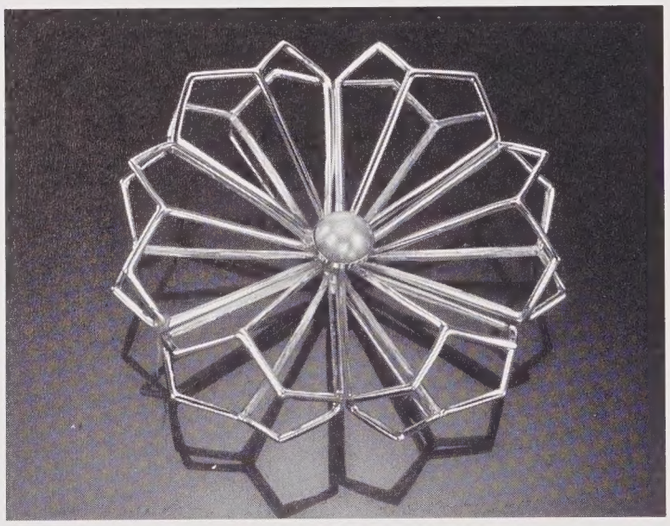

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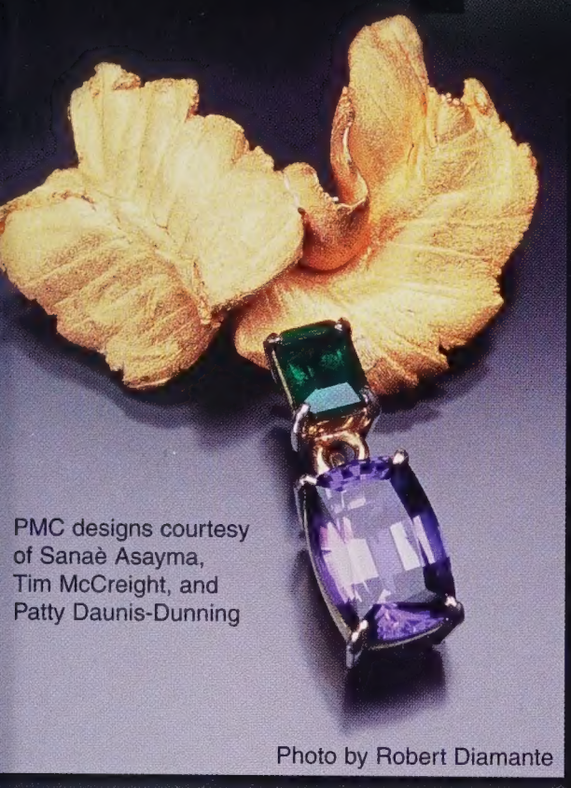

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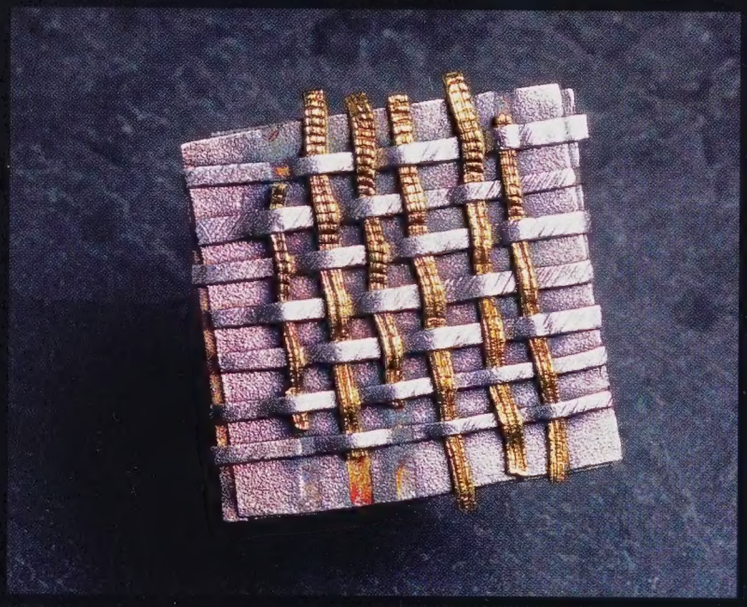

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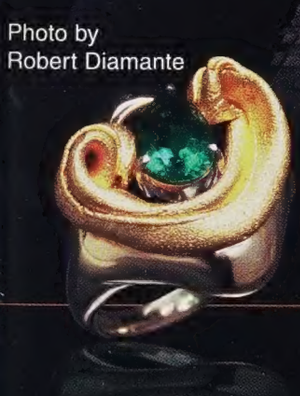

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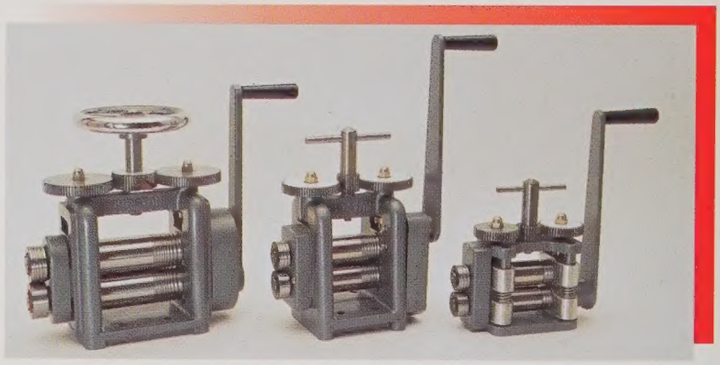

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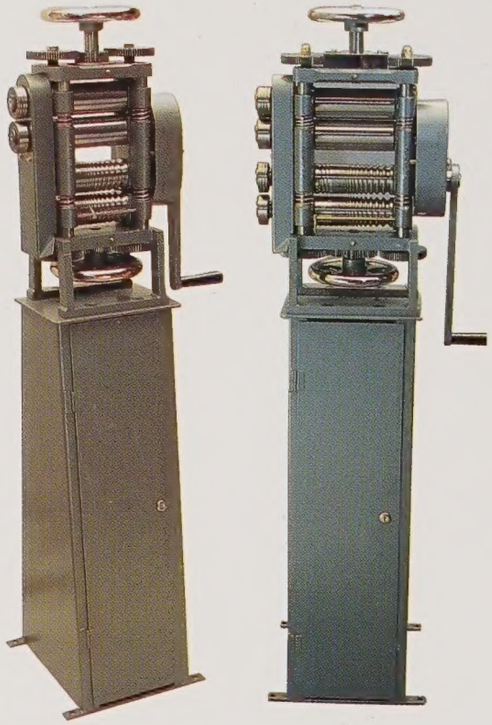

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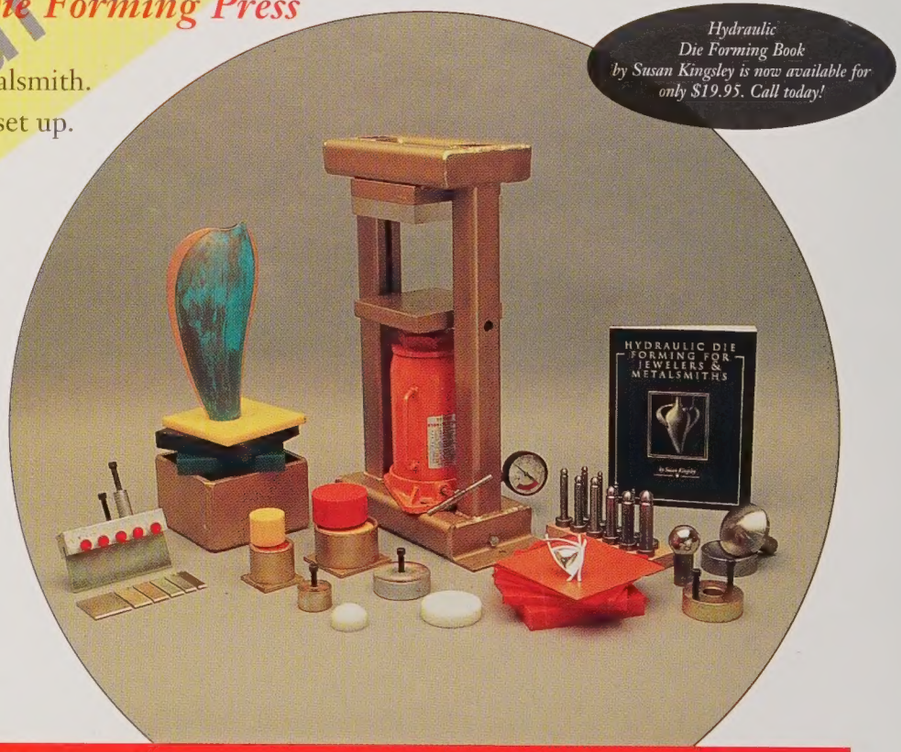

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